

REALIZE AND BE WHO YOU ARE IN GOD’S EYES:
A STUDY OF IDENTITY AMONGST
AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

CALLED TO BE: AN INVITATION TO REALIZE AND BE WHO YOU ARE IN GOD’S EYES

by
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The context is Bethel Missionary Baptist Church in Tallahassee, Florida. As the youth pastor, I have perceived a need for space to address the topic of identity in Christ. I hypothesize that if youth are taught biblical principles regarding God’s promises and their identity in Christ, they will have a better understanding of how to apply God’s biblical promises of identity in Christ to their lives. Through a biblical study on affirmation of their identity in Christ as well as a spiritual gifts inventory, adolescents will be able to utilize this knowledge and apply it to their lives as Christians.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to dedicate this project to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to the youth ministry of Bethel Missionary Baptist Church. I am grateful for and would like to acknowledge the support of God, my parents Michael and Linda Fegins along with my family, my pastor Rev. Dr. R. B. Holmes Jr. along with his family, Bethel's Children and Youth Ministry as well as the congregation of the Bethel Missionary Baptist Church in Tallahassee, Florida. I also would like to thank my mentors Rev. Dr. Elvin Sadler and Rev. Dr. Willie Marshall, Rev. Dr. David Nelson, my cohort's faculty consultant Rev. Dr. Madeline Hennes, as well as my cohort, my editor, Dr. Lori Spears, and the United Theological Seminary for their support during this project.

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INTRODUCTION

What role does affirmation play in the formation of an adolescent's identity? How would biblical affirmations impact adolescent's identity formation? These are questions that will be addressed throughout these chapters. The following chapters will address not only the process of identity formation in the life of a young believer, but also the role of biblical affirmations within that process. There is great significance in teaching youth to see themselves as Christ does. The significance is that when youth gain an understanding of who they are in Christ's eyes, they are becoming equipped to walk in their identity in Christ and fulfill their calling in life. It is through positive, biblical affirmations that youth are empowered to discover and operate in their identity in Christ Jesus. Through avenues, such as youth leadership and teachers, the Holy Spirit guides, affirms, and molds adolescents in the image and likeness of Christ in the process of their identity formation.

Therefore, in this process of identity formation, God guides youth through a process of self-discovery, internalization, and presentation of their understanding of who they are in God's eyes. The hope of this project is to provide an in-depth examination of the process of identity formation in the lives of adolescents and how God is at work to help adolescents form their identity upon the truths of God's holy word. The importance of doing so is that founding identity upon eternal truths equips youth to base their identity

and self-perception upon a solid foundation that remains dependable throughout every stage of their lives.

With this understanding, the following chapters will articulate the significance of affirmation in the process of identity formation. Furthermore, the chapters will articulate this process as well as its biblical foundation, theological foundation, historical foundation, and interdisciplinary foundation. The biblical foundation (chapter two) serves as an example of how God affirms and empowers youth to walk in the identity of Christ. The selected pericope will examine how David, through God's demonstrative affirmation, walks in his identity and defeats the Philistine giant Goliath. The historical foundation (chapter three) provides insight in the process of identity formation. In this chapter, there is an examination of the formation of Black YMCAs in America. Through these formations, the affirming support of philanthropists serve as foundations for Black YMCAs which were used to help Blacks develop a more positive sense of identity in their community. The theological foundation (chapter four) provides details surrounding the work of God in the identity formation of young believers as an agent of affirmation, activation, and aspiration. The interdisciplinary chapter (chapter five) discusses the process of identity formation seen in a social media community. This chapter provides an example of the process of self-discovery, an internalization of one's identity, a presentation of one's understanding of identity, and how affirmation helps youth navigate towards understanding who they are.

Together, each of these chapters work to explain the process through which God works to help adolescents develop a godly understanding of their identity so that they may contribute to their community in a way that is glorifying to their Creator.

Following the first five chapters there will be an examination of this doctoral project and the results that follow (chapter six). Within this examination is a description of the project, its findings, and conclusions about those findings. The project was completed within the duration of seven weeks. The first six weeks involved a Bible study on biblical affirmations followed by a week to discern spiritual gifts. The Bible study allowed students to gain an understanding of who they are in God's eyes, as well as how they can see themselves according to God's word.

The spiritual gifts assessment complimented the previous Bible study by equipping students with an understanding of their gifts so that they can learn what God has gifted them to do based upon who they are as a child of God. The findings of this project revealed how biblical affirmations empowered youth to understand and ultimately walk in their identity in Christ. Articulating the results of this project provides insight into how the application of biblical affirmations impacts the identity formation of adolescents who have come to faith in Jesus Christ.

The significance of this project is that it sheds light on the role of affirmations in the process of discipleship. The findings of this project allude to how biblical affirmations impacts youth in three ways. First, biblical affirmations guide youth towards not only the understanding but the application of their identity in Christ Jesus. In the process of forming an identity, biblical affirmations provide adolescent believers in Christ an opportunity to rehearse the truths of God's word so that it may take root in the heart and be seen in their lifestyle. Second, biblical affirmations empower youth to live by faith in their identity in Christ. As adolescents gain an understanding of who they are in God's eyes, they are empowered through the knowledge of God's word to live

according to the truths that Christ has declared about them. Third, biblical affirmations contribute to focusing on being in God's will. The affirmations of God's word carry the power to focus the believer on living in as well as doing the will of God. A part of discipleship is learning one's identity in Christ. Learning identity begins with learning the affirmations of God's word for the believer in Jesus Christ. As adolescent believers learn biblical affirmations to apply to their identity, they are being equipped to live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Given this ministry focus chapter, there are three objectives that I take into consideration. First, I seek to describe how my ministry interests and skills relate to the needs of the context. Secondly, I will determine how the relationship between my ministry interests and skills, as well as the needs of my context, forms the basis for this doctoral project. Lastly, there will be a statement of the general nature and content of my project through the development of a theme, hypothesis, and plan of implementation for this doctoral project. In doing so, I will complete these objectives by reviewing the reasons for writing this chapter.

Furthermore, there will also be a review of the needs of my church context, which was examined in the contextual analysis. By doing so, I will focus on the findings that impact the theme of this project and develop a hypothesis. Additionally, there will be a review of the skills and interests that contribute to the doctoral project's structure. Consequently, I will identify the topic that I intend to explore, how ministerial skills and interests serve the needs of my context, the nature, content of the proposed project and what I seek to learn through the doctoral project.

Ministry Context

As mentioned within the contextual analysis, the needs of the Bethel Missionary Baptist Church pertain to the youth within the church along with the surrounding community. An initial need of Bethel's congregation is to increase the involvement of youth in the ministries of the church. An additional need is to examine what changes are necessary for the church leadership's systemic approaches to increase the involvement of youth in the church.

The data points to the youth and young adults that are present in the community surrounding Bethel known as Frenchtown. For instance, in the Frenchtown community within a quarter-mile radius, 24.2% of the population ranges from ages fifteen to twenty-four years of age.¹ Within a half a mile radius, 41.7% are within this age range; within three-quarters of a mile, 41.9% of the Frenchtown population falls within this age range. Hence, the data for Frenchtown shows that the presence of youth within the community aligns with the need of the church to increase the involvement of those within these age groups.²

These statistical findings along with my examination of the church's needs influence my topic choice. As a minister to the youth of the congregation, I find that the data is helpful because of the void of active involvement amongst youth and young adults. Furthermore, the data also appears to call for an examination of the church's approach to implementing strategies to vitalize the involvement of its younger

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "2019 Population by Age," Table 1.1, U. S. Department of Commerce, last modified October 23, 2019, file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Community_Profile_04e8b525-735e-4ef6-8fcd-a589f392eaf6(1).pdf.

² U.S. Census Bureau, "2019 Population by Age," Table 1.1, file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Community_Profile_04e8b525-735e-4ef6-8fcd-a589f392eaf6(1).pdf.

generations in the ministries of the church. Therefore, knowing the statistical presence of youth within the surrounding community is helpful for the evangelistic efforts of Bethel. The data provides a pool of individuals that Bethel can minister to and possibly disciple.³

Consequently, identifying the needs of the church and seeing how Frenchtown's data deals with the needs of the church, I find that the skills and interests that I have contributed to helping address these needs. I will discuss my ministerial interests as well as the skills that I have developed within my professional development and educational development. I will point to each of these aspects to emphasize what I have learned and how it relates to discovering a solution to the matter of increasing the activity of youth within Bethel.

Skills and Interests from My Ministry Journey

Within my ministry journey, four areas that were enhanced were seminary skills, ministerial interests, educational development, and professional development. The following paragraphs will provide an elaboration of the development that has occurred in these areas. The significance of exploring these areas is that these paragraphs emphasize the experiences which have contributed to my personal growth as a Christian. Additionally, these experiences also point to the educational and professional development as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A skill that I have developed from my seminary experience is communicating the importance of God's presence in the lives of creation. In doing so, the interest that I developed, which I presume will contribute to improving the involvement and vitality of

³ U.S. Census Bureau, "2019 Population by Age," Table 1.1, [file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Community_Profile_04e8b525-735e-4ef6-8fcd-a589f392eaf6\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Community_Profile_04e8b525-735e-4ef6-8fcd-a589f392eaf6(1).pdf).

Bethel's youth, is one for prophetic ministry. A skill that I gleaned from my educational development is the impact of communication. I conclude that the approaches that I learned from communication in the business world can also be applied to the field of ministry. Additionally, another skill that I gleaned from my educational development is learning managerial principles, which I believe will help with leading initiatives to develop strategic approaches to impactfully reach out to youth and young adults. Lastly, in the case of my professional development, a skill that I learned to demonstrate is one of compassion. This has been influenced by my observation of pastors throughout my ministerial journey and by my seminarian colleagues. I will elaborate on each of these skills and show how they contribute to the formation of this doctoral project.

For instance, one of the skills that I learned in seminary and ministry is relating theology to the personal lives of congregants. Pointing to God's interactions in the world and the relevancy of God to the lives of humans is a skill that sharpened my experience as a minister to youth and a seminary student. Through preaching and teaching, I believe that articulating the relation between God and creation to youth and young adults is an important element needed to connect with them. Hence, I believe that doing so can be a positive contribution to help them understand the importance of developing a personal relationship with Christ.

Additionally, providing spaces for theological discussion to occur is another skill that I possess, which can contribute to helping youth learn more about Christ. As noted in my spiritual autobiography, I previously had the privileged to provide spaces for youth to learn more about the importance of Christ. I provided space by putting together a study for high school seniors. I believe that this skill of providing spaces for discussion is

something that I can contribute to help youth and young adults become more involved in the kingdom of God.

An interest that I have is the prophetic ministry. The desire to learn more about prophetic ministry was manifesting during my time in seminary school while obtaining my Master of Divinity degree. While fellowshipping with a prophetic prayer group, my interests in the prophetic ministry began to grow. My colleagues took the time to prayerfully speak a word of encouragement, exhortation, and comfort to one another, which had a lasting impact on my life. I witnessed men and women of God proclaim the word of the Lord into my life, as well as other's lives in that season of academia.

As a result, I desire for people to learn what God says, feels, and thinks about them. I hope to share and embody the heart, as well as the mind of God to my generation. Therefore, when I minister prophetically, I seek to couple this with an element of compassion. For example, I try to keep in mind what I learned from one of my seminarian colleagues, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." The importance of my interests in prophetic ministry, as it relates to Bethel's needs is that this can be used as an evangelistic tool to reach out to the youth within the community. Furthermore, I view it as God's way of revealing to young people his will and purpose for their lives. Therefore, to help young people fulfill their God-given purpose, I believe that a prophetic ministry is a necessary tool that God has granted to bring youth into their purpose and disciple them on their way into it.

To do so, I believe that my interest in the prophetic ministry is complimented with my ability to demonstrate compassion to the marginalized and the lost. To operate in the prophetic ministry takes a willingness to demonstrate Christ-like compassion, which I am

willing to do. Developing a sense of Christ-like compassion is something that I have grown to do throughout my time in ministry. I was privileged with opportunities to demonstrate the compassion of Christ while serving within a Baptist church during my seminary journey. In my experience, I was privileged to work with the impoverished, who came to our church for assistance. In my interactions with the impoverished, I learned to demonstrate the love of Christ by providing the help that I could for those who needed assistance, such as receiving food or clothing. Nonetheless, this experience allowed me to demonstrate the principle of 1 John 3:18, which says, “Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.”⁴ My involvement with the poor and marginalized shows the significance of this verse.

This experience has been influenced by my observation of godly pastors, such as my pastor in Middleburg, Florida, my seminary pastor in New Jersey, and my college pastor in Tallahassee, Florida. A common element that I witnessed in each of these pastors was that of compassion. Each pastor demonstrated compassion towards their congregation. Furthermore, as I grew older, I witnessed pastors, such as my college and seminary pastor, demonstrate compassion through church projects that would benefit the surrounding community. Projects involved the development of life centers and feeding the homeless. Nonetheless, through my observation of godly men and women demonstrating the love of Christ, I was given an example that helped to discern how I can and must demonstrate similar compassion.

Furthermore, in the aspect of educational development, a skill that I have learned is communication. Communication is something that I learned and still am improving. In

⁴ Biblical citations in this document will be from the New Living Translation unless otherwise stated, 1 John 3:18.

my undergraduate experience, I learned the significance of effective communication in the aspect of business and management. My professors taught me that it is important to effectively communicate in a way that articulates your business needs and how partnerships with others can be beneficial to all parties involved. What I gleaned from this experience is that communication skills contribute to successful outcomes in business and in ministry. Nonetheless, communication is something that needs to be developed in a greater capacity in my educational background, which can contribute to impactful evangelism. Moreover, the managerial principles that I learned contribute to the leadership that I can demonstrate to help provide solutions to the dilemma of increasing involvement of youth.

In the aspect of my professional development, a skill that has been cultivated is asking clarifying questions. When I do not understand, I seek understanding. For instance, in my spiritual autobiography it mentions working with a basketball league to put together a team of children from the surrounding communities. When unsure of certain matters, concerning registration or purchasing team apparel, I asked the league director clarifying questions. Therefore, I would know what was necessary to answer the questions of parents and to make sure the teams were prepared for their games and practices. Seeking understanding is a skill that will contribute to developing an understanding of what contributes to the lack of youth and young adults in the Bethel congregation. Hence, I suppose that the search for understanding is the beginning of discovering a solution to the problem. I find that asking clarifying questions is what helps me to become more effective when it comes to seeing the improvement of Bethel's ministry to the youth and young adults.

Furthermore, I would also say that learning to delegate responsibilities is a skill that I learned from seminary. While conducting Bible studies in seminary, I learned to delegate responsibilities so that the Bible studies would always have a teacher if I were not able to teach. Furthermore, delegating this responsibility provided me the opportunity to be taught and improve my understanding of how to walk closer with Christ. Delegating responsibilities is connected to the managerial principles learned in college and from my undergraduate experience. Nevertheless, I conclude that the factors I mentioned, such as prophetic ministry, proclamation of God's presence and importance, the demonstration of compassion, communication, managerial skills, appointing roles and responsibilities as well as searching for clarity to complete assignments are tools that positively contribute to the vitality and involvement of youth and young adults.

Synergy Development

My experience growing up under the influence of Christian parents shapes this doctoral project. As a child, my decisions were greatly influenced by those who led me throughout life, such as my parents and pastoral figures. Usually, because of the presence and influence of my parents, my decisions were positively influenced by their input. Hence, what I came to conclude in the initial stages of writing my spiritual autobiography is that because a follower's decisions can be influenced by leadership, leadership impacts the growth or maturation of its followers. Therefore, as I take the state of Bethel's youth and young adult ministry into consideration, I conclude that it is imperative to examine the influence of the youth's decisions. The youth's leadership is important to consider because what occurs in leadership can stifle or promote growth of its ministry. This is the

connection that I see between my personal experience and the experience of Bethel's youth and young adult ministry.

Therefore, the topic that I intend to explore throughout this doctoral project is the impact of youth leadership's positive affirmation upon the identity formation of youth. What I hope to address is that leadership's impact will influence the growth and development of the youth. Therefore, being that leadership can impact the development of the youth ministry, this can also impact how involved youth are in the work of the church. By addressing these matters, I hope to learn what, within the leadership of a church, can stifle or promote growth of this ministry. By learning this, I hope to identify what works and what does not work for the good of youth and young adults within my congregation and the surrounding community.

The Significance of the Youth Ministry

The general nature and content of this project consists of recognizing and providing affirmations that allow youth to gain an understanding of who they are in Christ's eyes, identifying how these affirmations impact identity formation, and how these biblical affirmations empower youth to walk in their identity in Christ. The project's content also consists of an examination of biblical principles, which would serve as an affirmation that youth can learn to help them better understand who they are called to be and what they are called to do as a believer in Jesus Christ. It is necessary to consider the significant role that youth involvement plays in the life of the congregation. By affirming the identity of Christ in a young person's life, one can encourage and empower youth to walk in their God-given identity and their calling. Youth's

participation is vital in fulfilling their God-given purpose in life, which is to serve Christ. Additionally, youth who are actively involved are becoming prepared to potentially lead ministries in the life of the church. Therefore, leadership's positive affirmation of youth is significant because the future of the church is contingent upon the service and involvement of youth. How the youth of the congregation prepare and how they lead, will influence the future vitality, effectiveness, and growth of the church.

Godly Growth as an Impact of Positive Affirmations of Youth

Secondly, when it comes to the growth of the youth ministry, by the growth I refer to two things, that is to develop an understanding of identity in Christ and to increased involvement in ministry once this is realized. By understanding how Christ sees them and walking according to that understanding, I contend that godly growth in a ministry involves its participants becoming more like Christ Jesus in mindset, attitude, and conduct. Genuine growth amongst the youth ministry involves seeing a developmental increase of the fruit of the Spirit manifesting in their lives. Next, growth refers to increased involvement in the ministry of the church. Growth can entail an increased involvement in the works and ministry of the church as youth participants grow into the image and likeness of Christ Jesus. In this case, the consequence of youth's spiritual maturation in Christ would result in increased involvement and passion for the ministry of God's kingdom. To increase involvement amongst youth would be a consequence of the development of their relationship with God and their understanding of their identity in Christ.

A Key to Godly Growth in the Youth Ministry: A Need for Understanding Identity in Christ

Additionally, it is also imperative to consider the hindrances to strengthening the youth of the congregation to become actively involved disciples. This third point is necessary to consider because if hindrances are present and remain unaddressed, they can remain a threat to the vitality of the youth ministries of the church. These are the elements that stop the progression of the youth ministry towards a godly sense of growth as previously defined. For instance, a hindrance to the development of youth would be a lack of understanding how Christ sees them, which impacts a person's self-perception. When there is a lack of understanding of how Christ sees youth, they are less likely to live as God has called them to live.

What Helps Produce Godly Growth amongst the Youth Ministry: Positive Affirmations

How these types of hindrances have been addressed so far were through Sunday school lessons. Through these Bible lessons, youth have been able to learn how God has called them to live. Therefore, students gain an understanding of what they are called to do. However, I did see a need to specifically address the matter of how Christ sees a believer and how that impacts his or her perspective of his or herself, as well as his or her activity in ministry.

Furthermore, another way that the youth ministry has addressed the matter of affirmation are through ministry notifications. For instance, when contacting youth at Bethel, God's love for youth and their families were affirmed through email. This is one example of leadership's positive affirmations of youth, which encourages them to see themselves as loved by God. Following this introductory affirmation, youth leadership

would provide notifications about the youth ministry and its events. Therefore, through virtual contact youth are affirmed and encouraged to participate in ministry events.

Furthermore, there are events in the ministry, such as Report Card Recognition and holiday programs where youth leadership took initiative to affirm youth. During these gatherings where students throughout the community attend service, youth leadership took initiative to affirm youth's academic progression and participation in the ministry. A strength of Bethel's youth ministry is affirming the participation of the youth and providing information concerning the ministries of the church. Additionally, there is a moment of pastoral remarks where the pastor commends and affirms youth's participation in the ministry. Therefore, the significance of this affirmation of youth leadership is that it is a demonstration of appreciation for the youth of the congregation, which carries the potential to encourage further participation. These environments provided opportunities for youth leadership to not only affirm the youth of the congregation, but to also articulate the significance of their participation and desire to serve.

By affirming youth, leadership is contributing to the continual participation and development of youth within the congregation. The positive affirmation of youth displays an acknowledgement of the presence of youth in the congregation and the significance of their presence. Acknowledging the presence of youth in the congregation highlights that the identity of youth is important and emphasizes the calling and purpose of youth in the body of Christ. Affirming the participation of youth is a display of appreciation for the presence of youth in the congregation. Furthermore, it is a realization of the significance of their participation and identity. By positively affirming youth's presence, youth

leadership is exemplifying that in the eyes of God, youth are important and have a calling to fulfill in the community.

Along with these examples of affirmation, youth leadership has faced the challenge of developing outreach and in-reach efforts to positively affirm youth in a way that leads to their spiritual development as believers in Christ. When mentioning in-reach, this is a reference to contacting students within the church community and outreach is a reference to contacting youth outside of the community of the congregation. In-reach initiatives provide congregants an opportunity to develop a sense of community with fellow believers. In-reach serves as a reminder of the church's intentionality to strengthen that which remains. Outreach is an evangelistic effort of the congregation that youth leadership utilizes to engage students who may not be a part of a Christian community.

How youth leadership has sought to provide positive affirmations of youth is by inviting youth within the congregation to participate in Bible studies for their age, as well as additional events such as holiday programs. The Bible studies have provided an opportunity for youth leadership to specifically affirm youth to walk according to God's word with the intention of improving their spiritual growth and application of the biblical principles taught. Therefore, the Bible studies have been an outlet for in-reach to affirm the development of youth in their walk with Christ. However, the Bible studies have also been an outlet for evangelism. For instance, youth within the congregation are encouraged to invite a friend to join the Bible study. Hence, youth leadership encourages youth to partake in the evangelistic efforts of the church to utilize the Bible study as a way to bring other youth to Christ.

In addition to Bible studies, youth leadership has also sought to emphasize ministry announcements within worship services. What I refer to in this case is highlighting events and activities for youth when there are special events for the youth ministry. These events are announced from the pulpit. This has proven to be one of the most influential ways of broadcasting an event for a ministry. This is the moment where those who are present in service and the online streaming community can hear what is occurring in the life of the church. Therefore, this seems to be an opportune time to make a ministry event successful. Announcements within the worship service compliment the ministry notifications that are sent out throughout the week. Whenever notifications may go unnoticed during the week, the worship service announcements provide another means of communication to encourage youth participation.

The significance of highlighting the presence of the youth ministry in the worship service is that it is youth leadership's public affirmation of the significance of youth and the importance of investing in the spiritual and holistic development of their identity in Christ. As a result, the announcements provide congregants an opportunity to prepare youth for these events and to also make preparation for their attendance. Youth's leadership has demonstrated a concern to highlight the importance of youth's presence, which exemplifies a genuine care for the well-being of youth within and outside of the congregation. However, the hindrance appears to be a failure to do so consistently.

In past occurrences, when the youth ministry had specific topics for a youth retreat or for Sunday school or Bible study, the attendance was increased when encouraged by the pastor or youth leadership. When consistent emphasis has been placed on activities within the youth ministry, youth leadership has seen participation from

youth. Hence, consistent announcements and emphasis on ministries has been a way for youth leadership to engage youth within and outside of the church. Consequently, consistent announcements have served as a way of affirming the presence of youth, their significance in the community and the importance of their calling from God. The intent of doing so is to guide youth towards an understanding of who Christ is, who he has called them to be, and what he has called them to do.

An additional challenge that youth leadership has faced is when student's extracurricular activities conflict with the scheduled events for youth at Bethel. For example, on Saturdays, Bethel began a virtual session for each of the ministries to do Bible studies. However, due to extracurricular activities such as sports or jobs, students are not always able to attend. Being that this is an uncontrollable circumstance at times, youth leadership continued to remain in contact with these students and encourage them to attend whenever they are available. Nevertheless, the continual communication serves as a way to constantly affirm youth with the intent of helping them to develop into who God has called them to be.

Within the virtual Bible studies, youth leadership provides space for conversation and questions from youth about the lesson. By doing so, youth leadership engaged students to help them apply biblical principles to their lives. Hearing the questions from youth allows for them to process what is being taught and how it can be practiced in their daily living. For example, when discussing matters such as handling peer pressure or developing one's social life, the topic involves carefully approaching the conversation. Youth leadership provides questions for youth to consider that help them to arrive to a conclusion about how to handle situations they have been confronted with. Furthermore,

youth leadership affirms the notion of youth making godly decisions by exhorting youth with wise and godly counsel in these sessions. The counsel that is given in response to youth's questions helps them to clarify how to approach matters they are confronted with in school in a godly way. Therefore, youth leadership's engagement with youth in these sessions have served as affirmations of making godly decisions that help improve the development and conduct of youth who participate in the Bible studies.

Fourthly, it is necessary to take into consideration what helps strengthen the youth to become more Christ-like and involved in ministry. For example, a strength of Bethel's youth ministry and leadership is that Bethel has a unique way of cultivating events as well as spaces that provide youth an opportunity to walk in their identity in Christ as a servant of God. For instance, when visiting senior living facilities, the youth ministry worked towards collecting clothing for senior citizens during the Christmas holidays. Another example of youth's engagement with the community prior to COVID-19 is when youth leadership along with youth from the congregation would visit nursing home facilities and provide a worship service for its residents.

Although interaction with others was limited due to COVID-19, the youth ministry has provided virtual spaces along to unite youth. For example, youth have worked along with leaders in the church and community to encourage youth town hall meetings. These gatherings were to encourage youth to seek guidance surrounding COVID-19 vaccinations and to share helpful information with their peers to keep their community safe. Nevertheless, town hall meetings such as these united youth from the church and congregation together. This is an example of how the youth ministry has

engaged its community with the help of leaders from the church and community during the pandemic to help serve and encourage one another.

A second strength, which was alluded to previously is ministerial announcements in a corporate setting. When ministry announcements are emphasized by the pastor from the pulpit, as well as youth leadership, and youth within the youth ministry there is a stronger possibility of participation and attendance from those involved or impacted by the ministry's events. Hence, the church's advertisement of ministry events from the pulpit have been an additional strength that has helped strengthen the involvement of youth in the life of the church. Therefore, youth are learning through participation how to live as a Christian in their community.

Two additional strengths of the youth ministry are face-to-face and virtual interaction. Face-to-face interactions have usually occurred when youth leadership interacts with youth whenever the ministry holds in-person events for youth. Due to the pandemic, social distancing has impacted face-to-face interactions, such as the Youth's COVID-19 town hall meeting. Other in-person activities consist of youth choir rehearsals, where youth leadership and other youth connect with youth. These types of in-person interactions allow youth leadership to affirm youth in their gifts and participation within the congregation. While engaging in these ministries for youth, students are able to connect with their leadership and one another while developing a sense of community where they are growing in their understanding of what it means to serve and live for Jesus Christ.

Virtual gatherings, such as Bible studies provide youth leadership an opportunity to interact with students that they may not have been able to see due to transitioning from

in-person to virtual classes. Another way that this ministry partakes in face-to-face communication is by extending invitations to ministry activities, such as choir rehearsal. Consequently, this leads to more in-depth communication in Bible classes, such as Saturday bible school. Therefore, the in-depth conversation occurring in the classroom setting leads to students learning from each other, encouraging one another, and developing their walks with Christ together.

Moreover, another asset of the youth ministry is that it has developed a social media outlet to notify and engage the community of youth in the congregation. For instance, as one of the leaders of the youth ministry, I have been able to connect youth with the social media page, where they can connect with one another whenever they would like to and receive notifications about the ministry and events to participate in. On this social media page, followers are informed about the events and gatherings occurring in this ministry. Furthermore, social media interaction provides a space for students to connect with one another. For instance, in addition to ministry announcements, I have been able to connect with students to see how everyone is doing in school and outside of the Bible studies that we usually have together. Hence, social media interaction is not only informative, but also providing an opportunity to connect with youth in the congregation. Nevertheless, this is what makes social media interaction one of the additional ways that the youth ministry has connected with students to help affirm them in their identity in Christ.

Face-to-face interactions, along with social media interactions, are a compliment to Bethel's youth ministry. Person-to-person interaction has the potential to leave a lasting impression on youth because it provides an opportunity for a community of youth

to connect with one another and receive affirmations to empower them in their relationship with Christ. Social media interaction is also a necessary element, which is accommodating to the technologically savvy generation of youth who can experience encouragement as they learn more about the ministries and activities of the church. Both elements contribute to the strength of the ministry's impact, vitality, and relevancy.

Youth Leadership's Response to Bring Godly Growth to the Youth Ministry: Biblical Principles Taught as Positive Affirmations

Knowing the significance of the youth's presence in the congregation, along with gleaning how youth leadership's affirmation helps to strengthen this ministry, youth leadership can potentially gain an idea of how to contribute to the development of the youth ministry. Therefore, by doing so, leadership can count on its knowledge of what is helping and strengthening the presence of the youth in the congregation. Consider how youth leadership's positive affirmations can impact the development of youth in the congregation. In the various ways articulated, youth leadership provides positive affirmations that encourage the development of youth's relationship with Christ. the purpose of doing so is to empower and equip them to walk in their identity in Christ. Therefore, with these examples in mind, I propose implementing a class that specifically addresses the matter of studying biblical affirmations that equip youth to walk in their identity in Christ. The Bible studies within the congregation help students to learn how to live the Christian life that God has called them to. However, based upon the positive affirmations given, I deem it necessary to implement a class on affirmation and identity in Christ so that students would learn to see themselves as Christ does. Furthermore, by learning to view themselves through what God says, youth are empowered to understand

the significance of their calling and giftings from God, as well as the significance of who they are in Christ. I believe that grasping an understanding of these truths will help youth to walk in their identity. Teaching biblical affirmations would provide scriptural foundation for the affirmation that youth receive. Therefore, as youth hear the positive and biblical affirmations of youth leadership, I anticipate that youth would be able to understand how these affirmations are reflecting God's perspective of them. By learning God's perspective of who they are, I anticipate that students will be able to align their understanding of themselves with God's word.

A potential problem that might not be removed but can be controlled would be addressing sensitive topics, such as sexuality or how to develop a social life without compromising Christian principles that we stand on as Christians. This topic may still be a sensitive topic that may not always be fully addressed in a public setting but can be more impactfully addressed through counseling sessions to provide an in-depth insight as to how to address these matters. The significance of providing a class that teaches biblical principles as affirmations for identity in Christ is that it enables students to see sensitive topics through the lenses of God's word and how he wants them to address these matters. The content of this project involves considering biblical affirmations as steps that youth leadership move towards growing in godliness and in their understanding of who God has created them to be. Furthermore, strengthening the vitality of the church would involve continuing to implement the practices that lead to godly growth, such as teaching students the significance of their identity and calling based upon God's word, which carries the potential to lead youth towards godly development and a greater understanding of the importance of their participation in the youth ministry. To improve the growth of youth

ministry, it is necessary to consider learning the significance of youth's presence, the affirmations that lead to its growth, what strengthens the youth's spiritual maturation and involvement, and leadership's role in discerning what helps and hinders youth's maturation in Christ and involvement in ministry.

Continuing to practice the strengths, such as affirming youth through face-to-face and social media interactions along with announcing ministry events in a corporate setting are helpful. Additionally, determining how to perfect what is working is necessary for the growth and wellbeing of the church. The purpose of the project is to continue the work of affirmation that youth leadership has started in the lives of youth within the congregation. By doing so, biblical principles will be taught to help students gain a biblical foundation for the affirmations that they have heard. Furthermore, by learning these affirmations, youth will also learn how God sees them. By learning God's perspective of them, youth will then gain an understanding of the truth of their identity. I perceive that gaining a biblical understanding of the affirmations declared over youth can help them to better understand the truth about who they are. Take, for instance, consistently hearing affirmations of the importance of youth's presence in the church is an affirmation articulating that in God's eyes youth are important and have something to contribute to their community for God's glory. Furthermore, continuing the habit of person-to-person contact with youth in Bible classes and other ministry gatherings can contribute to developing a sense of community and highlights the principle that God cares for the personal, well-being, and development of each adolescent. A class teaching biblical principles as affirmations help students to solidify their perspective of who they are and to know that it is aligned with God's word. To help youth walk in their identity in

Christ, youth leadership must consider how its positive and biblical affirmations contribute to the formation of youth's identity. This is all done to equip students with a biblical understanding that allows them to align themselves with God's word so that they may accomplish God's will.

Hopeful Outcomes of this Doctor of Ministry Project

Through this doctoral project, I am looking forward to seeing a transformation take place. I hope to see three factors as a result of partaking in this doctoral project. These factors consist of the following, youth gain an understanding of biblical affirmations that help them understand their identity in Christ, have a Christ-centered perception of themselves, and an understanding of how to utilize biblical affirmations to shape their identity and life in the image of Christ.

I find these three elements necessary to experience in my life as well as in my congregation to fulfill divine destiny. For kingdom assignments to be fulfilled, experiencing these three factors are what causes congregations, corporately and individually, to fulfill their God-given purposes in life. I am understanding through this program that the significance of aligning perspective with God's word. Therefore, learning to see my life through God's perspective is necessary because someone in my congregation may be experiencing the same thing.

Moreover, confronting the hindrances to godly growth and positioning myself for deliverance is important because I need to be delivered to help deliver others. This is what I am seeking to do given what I learn about myself within this program. I feel that as I do so, I am better equipped to help others. For me, learning about myself and how to

address what I learn about myself is the beginning of my deliverance and the deliverance of others. Hence, this project is important because it is helping me to prepare to be whom God has called me to be for his kingdom. I will elaborate on how I view and define these factors and their significance to this project.

A) Understanding Identity in Christ

As mentioned earlier, I hope to learn what I do not know. Essentially, I hope to learn what potential hindrances are present in my life, as well as the life of the church, that may stop godly growth. Additionally, I desire to learn what may be present in my life and congregation that is promoting the godly growth that I desire to see. I find this first factor significant because I believe it can and will help me to identify undetected problems that cultivate a sense of bondage. Furthermore, I also conclude that learning one's identity in Christ is the beginning of unveiling what is helping to promote godly growth.

B) Developing a Christ-centered Perspective of Self

Additionally, I hope to learn how to experience deliverance from hindrances given the realization of these factors. What I refer to in this case is learning how to lay down any hindrances or how to properly address them. I seek to learn in what ways that could be done, if possible. I am hoping to discover strategic approaches to overcoming obstacles to godly growth. The outcome that I seek to discover is that learning biblical affirmations of identity in Christ help to develop a godly perspective of oneself. The

result of this seems to be overcoming inaccurate perceptions of oneself that would hinder developing into who Christ has designed you to be.

C) Utilizing Biblical Affirmations to Shape Identity to the Likeness of Christ

Lastly, I seek to witness a breakthrough in my life, as well as in the life of my congregation. As a result of this project, I desire to witness a more developed sense of godly growth personally and within the congregation. I believe that identifying hindrances and helpful factors to godly growth can occur when learning God's affirmations of identity, which is the beginning of a breakthrough. As a result, people can then experience and display the fruit of Christ. I conclude that when people become more like Christ so will their service to the church. An increase in Christlikeness, as well as involvement in his church, is the type of breakthrough that I hope and desire to see.

At the end of this doctoral project, I hope to develop and help others develop an understanding of their identity in Christ. I believe that the result is that I can witness God unveil hindrances and helpful factors that lead to godly growth. Furthermore, I hope to learn and implement biblical affirmations led by the Spirit of God that align my and other people's self-perceptions with the word of God. Therefore, I anticipate that this can bring forth deliverance. As a result, I expect to witness a breakthrough as a result of learning to apply God's biblical affirmations to identity in Christ. I am hoping to see my congregation and myself reach a more in-depth level of godly development. As hindrances and helpful factors are unveiled, and wisdom is given to overcome hindrances, I expect to witness godly growth. I hope to see the fruit of the Spirit increase along with involvement in the ministries of the church.

When mentioning growth, I refer to Christ-like development. As I mention growth, I am referring to developing character, mindsets, and behavior that is likened unto that of Christ Jesus. By learning this, I hope to help my congregation identify what youth leadership can do to cultivate strategies that enhance the development of young people into disciples of Jesus Christ who will produce disciples.

Conclusion

As previously mentioned, the statement of the general nature and content of my project, consist of several things. I anticipate the project will point to the significant role of youth leadership's positive affirmations of youth in the congregation. Teaching biblical affirmations concerning identity in Christ will be utilized to equip students with an understanding of how God sees them. By youth leadership utilizing scripture to teach students how God sees them is what leads to godly growth for the youth ministry, the development of Christ-like character, and ministry involvement producing the duplication of disciples. I anticipate that it will also identify hindrances to the maturation of the youth ministry. Further, it will identify how helpful these affirmations are in contributing to the growth of the youth ministry. Finally, the project is designed to discern what youth leadership impacts of teaching biblical affirmations about identity in Christ.

These steps can provide clarity regarding what is helping the progression of the church's youth towards their divine purpose in Christ Jesus. Approaching these steps can be a way of working towards improvements that can benefit not just the youth ministries but the overall well-being of the church. Therefore, the questions and matters, which have been addressed are significant. Why? I would say because it tends to address how a

congregation not only increases its vitality and impact presently, but also how it is preparing to be vital and impactful in the future. Strengthening the youth to see themselves as God does is what I believe can help the youth ministry and congregation to develop into the image and likeness of Christ. Addressing these matters has the potential to help the church examine how it will remain and be relevant for future generations to come.

The theme of this project that I will address is “Called to Be: An Invitation to Realize and Be Who You are in God’s Eyes.” I will address how the positive affirmations taught will impact the future development of the youth that are being served in the congregation and community. Hence, my working hypothesis would be the following statement, if youth are taught biblical principles regarding God’s promises and their identity in Christ, they will have a better understanding of how to apply God’s biblical promises of identity in Christ to their lives. Given this hypothesis, the general plan of implementation will consist of several components. First, I will teach the biblical principles that serve as affirmations of identity in Christ.

Secondly, I will provide a spiritual gifts assessment to compliment the study of affirmations of identity in Christ. The purpose of the Bible study and the assessment is to teach how God sees his children, and to help youth understand what God has gifted them to do as his child. After the Bible study and spiritual gifts assessment, there will be a survey of how these affirmations impact youth’s understanding of how God sees them and how they see themselves. Examining the impacts of these affirmations upon the identity formation of youth will help the youth leadership decipher how helpful this approach is when helping youth develop as disciples of Christ.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Considering the topic of the influence of affirmation upon the adolescent's identity formation, it is necessary to consider a biblical example of affirmation impacting an adolescent's life and decisions. The biblical narrative of David and Goliath serves as a scriptural display of God serving as the leader, who provides affirmation to an adolescent engaged in battle against the enemy of his countrymen. The impact of the adolescent David believing in the affirmation of God is what will be taken into consideration in this chapter. Within this chapter, there will be an analysis of the historical, literary, and social context of 1 Samuel 17:32-40. Furthermore, there will also be an analysis of the biblical text. Within this passage, it is necessary to notice six elements at work in the passage: a declaration, doubt, assurance, assistance, a decline, and a position. Each of these elements is interconnected and contribute to the realization of faith's role in the following narrative.

Historical Context

In this passage, it is necessary to consider the historical, literary, and social context. The historical context of the passage is one that points to the people of Israel now serving under a human king. In the beginnings of 1 Samuel, the people of Israel served under the leadership of the Lord God, he was counted as their King, and Samuel

was a prophetic voice for the Lord to them. In 1 Samuel chapter eight, Israel desired a different king to lead them. The people desired to have a human king instead of God. As Samuel the prophet goes to the Lord in prayer, he is instructed to grant their request. The Lord directs him to a man named Saul, who would serve as the first human king of Israel. Saul was anointed by Samuel and declared king in 1 Samuel chapter ten.

Within chapters thirteen and fifteen of 1 Samuel, Saul begins to deviate from devotion to the Lord God. Due to his disobedience that he continuously demonstrates towards God, the Lord rejects him as king. Consequently, the Lord is preparing to choose another person to become king at this time. As Saul remains king, the Lord directs Samuel to a shepherd boy named David from the house of Jesse. David is then anointed as king and continues in his position as a shepherd for his father. Following the anointing of David as the new king of Israel, the people of Israel encountered a time of war under the leadership of Saul, who must decide how to approach the warfare that they are engaged in with their enemies, the Philistines. Having endured the continual and blasphemous threats of Goliath, the Philistine warrior, Israel is now in need of supernatural intervention to overcome their enemies. Abraham Kuruvilla mentions the following concerning Goliath, “The man’s stature is fearsome. Taking a cubit as approximately eighteen inches, and a span as nine, the MT’s “six cubits and a span” (17:4) has Goliath at nine feet nine inches tall. With average heights of those in ancient Israel likely ranging from five to five and a half feet, this is truly a formidable foe.”¹ Nevertheless, the description of Goliath highlights the intimidation of his presence.

¹ Abraham Kuruvilla, “David V. Goliath (1 Samuel 17): What is the Author Doing with What He is Saying?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58, no. 3 (2015): 492, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLAIBCB160506001613&site=ehostlive>>DavidV.

Furthermore, understanding his description allows one to see the challenge that lies before Israel. Hence, the need for the Lord's intervention is necessary for Israel to find one capable of overcoming the Philistine giant.

Literary Context

The literary context of the passage is one that provides a record of supernatural occurrence. First Samuel serves as a record of the history of Israel. Within the record of Israel's history, the account of this passage serves as a testimony of divine intervention. The text points to the faithfulness of God to intervene on behalf of his people even after they rejected his kingship. Additionally, the following passage in 1 Samuel points to the miraculous occurrences that have transpired throughout the history of Israel. The Book of 1 Samuel provides an account of Israel's origins as a people and the process they endure to reach a point of faith in the Lord their God. The literary basis of this passage is filled with a history of God's faithfulness and salvation placed on display for the world to see.

Social Context

The social context of the passage articulates the ways of God. The ways of the Lord can be counted as contrary to the reader of the passage. The king searches for a warrior who is suitable to defeat a giant, who has engaged in war since his youth. The strategy of the Lord involved sending a shepherd boy, who was not even a part of the king's army, to defeat the giant that Israel faced. In its social context, the passage highlights the uniqueness of God's methods of deliverance. The history of Israel in this passage reveals the peculiarity of God. For instance, in this passage, the Lord chooses

someone who is an unlikely hero to provide a solution to an army's problem.

Additionally, the social context of the passage also alludes to the affirmation that God provides to his servants. David's confidence was based upon the ability of God to support him in battle. Hence, the passage implies that God is faithful to affirm his servants and to help them fulfill his divine purpose.

The passage in 1 Samuel 17:32-40 contains six elements: A declaration, doubt, assurance, assistance, a decline, and a position. First, there is a notion of affirmation in the text. Affirmation in this passage is seen as God's support of David in his attempts to battle Goliath. Verse thirty-two is where David confidently declares his willingness to fight Goliath. Within this verse, there is recognition, a sense of confidence, and a declaration that is based upon the affirmation of the Lord.

A Declaration

His declaration alludes to his recognition of God's affirmation. In a time of warfare, the armies of Israel are frightened while a young boy stands confidently declaring, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine (vs. 32)." How could a young boy speak so confidently? The text implies that he recognizes something that the king and the armies of Israel appear to not understand. David recognizes God's ability to support him in his warlike efforts against the enemies of Israel. The affirmation of God is recognized by David and consequently influences his speech. The application to consider is that recognition impacts the declaration of David. His ability to recognize the affirmation of God is what enabled him to speak a sanctified speech, a peculiar speech came from his mouth due to what he believed in his heart.

Following his recognition of God's affirmation, David displays confidence. The significance of this is that what is recognized by David influences what arises from within him. His awareness of God's presence with him is what produced and fed his confidence to obtain victory. An awareness of God in the text produced in him the necessity to fight. The awareness of God's presence is what produces confidence, which is what was needed to even approach the Philistine giant. What the reader sees in the text is that confidence begins to come out of David.

How does David's confidence come out? It comes out initially through his speech. The pattern within this verse is that David's recognition of God's presence produces a level of confidence. Consequently, his confidence manifests in his words. Hence, the passage tells of a confident boy preparing for battle. His declaration is one of confidence that he has prepared to act out.

Notice in the passage that David not only displays confidence but expels any fear. He tells the king, "Let no one's heart fail because of him." The confident declaration of David expels any fear. In other words, David leaves no room for fear having the assurance that God will enable him to win this battle against Goliath.² Additionally, his statement not only alludes to expelling fear, but also a demonstration following his declaration. David is not merely speaking but preparing to act. He is not solely talking but acting on what he has spoken. David did not just encourage King Saul to relinquish any fear but prepared himself to fight against what intimidated his fellow countrymen. The declaration is one that displays confidence in the affirming power of God. Therefore, by

² Derek Cooper and Martin J. Lohrmann, *1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 83.

faith in the power of the Lord, David leaves no room for fear and is beginning to demonstrate the confidence that he has proclaimed.

The affirmation of the Lord is prevalent within the remaining portion of this pericope. David's declaration of faith reveals his confidence that God has affirmed him and will provide him the necessary support to win the battle that lies before him. The affirmation of God is what impacted the confidence of the youthful lad. Therefore, the passage points to the power and sufficiency of God's support.

A Doubt

Verse thirty-three is where the text shifts from highlighting a confident declaration to highlighting a declaration of doubt. In response to the confident boy, King Saul replies with a declaration of doubt. Kuruvilla mentions the following concerning Saul, "Looking only at the outside, Saul had neglected to see with the eyes of God, with the fear of God, and with trust in God. Therefore, despite the fact that his stature was considerable, his resources extensive, and his experience in war remark."³ The king replies stressing the incapability of David to defeat a man who has learned war since his youth (vs. 33). Note the comparison of the two declarations in verse thirty-two and verse thirty-three. One is a declaration of faith, and another is a declaration of doubt. The declaration of faith was based upon recognition of God's presence. Therefore, recognition was followed by internal confidence that was verbalized by David. However, in verse thirty-three, the statement of King Saul reveals the exact opposite of what is seen

³ Kuruvilla, "David V. Goliath (1 Samuel 17)," 496-497.

in David's declaration. Saul's declaration implies a lack of recognition, a display of doubt, and a declaration of doubt.

Concerning recognition, the statement of the king insinuates his inability to initially recognize the supporting power of God in this moment of the war.⁴ More specifically, Saul's lack of confidence in David implies that he does not perceive the affirming power of God to be with David. The implication is that a stance of affirmation was opposed by a stance of doubt. When the young boy felt affirmed by the Lord his country's leader did not initially support him. The text reveals that Saul's lack of recognition caused him to doubt the capabilities of David and verbalize his doubts concerning the youth's efforts. The doubt of Saul points to his doubts concerning David but also raises questions about his faith in God to use David. When there was no display of faith in David, could this also mean demonstrating no initial display of faith in God?

Furthermore, the lack of recognition shifts into internal doubt, which is proclaimed by Saul. The rationale fueling Saul's doubts is the youth of David, as well as what he perceives to be a lack of experience in warfare. Saul tells the boy, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth (vs. 33)." Saul misinterprets David's youth to be an indicator of a lack of experience. The rationale behind his doubt causes him to overlook the capability of David.⁵ Therefore, Saul's declaration of doubt possessed the power to make him shun the solution to his present dilemma. Since Saul did not yet recognize the presence of God

⁴ David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 328.

⁵ Paul Evans, *First and Second Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2018), 190.

with David, his lack of recognition became evident in his speech. The comparison of these two declarations reveals that recognition or the lack of it impacts one's speech and behavior.

The response of the king to the young boy, David, implies a principle of faith. Perhaps, the principle in the passage is one way to demonstrate faith in God by demonstrating faith in others. In the passage, to demonstrate faith in God is to have confidence that he can provide victory through an unlikely source, which happened to be fulfilled through David.⁶ To doubt the capability of David can be interpreted as doubting the capability of God to help the boy engage in warfare. Hence, the principle of faith in God shown through faith in others is prevalent in the passage. This principle reveals that there is a dependence upon the Lord to provide the necessities for this time of war.

The declarations of doubt and faith in these first two verses flow from a recognition of God's presence and ability to provide support. These declarations determine who can visualize victory or remain blind to it. The significance of faith in the text is that it provides an opportunity for God to provide salvation for his people. The importance of doubt in this passage is that it is a blockage that does not allow room for salvation to occur. David's confidence against Goliath was based upon his confidence in God.⁷ His confidence was based upon the affirmation of the Lord. The significant factor is that when the affirmation of God is recognized, it will begin to impact speech, behavior, and interactions with others. The affirmation of God is what impacts and produces faith in God.

⁶ Robert P. Gordon, *1 and 2 Samuel* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1984), 62.

⁷ Navigators Staff, *1 and 2 Samuel* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group, 2018), 40-41.

The elements of doubt and faith not only play a role in the outcome of this narrative but also carry a communal impact. The role that faith and doubt play in this passage is that it influences the outcome for the entire Israeli community. The context of this passage shows that Goliath challenges any Israelite warrior to fight him. The condition is that if the Israelite warrior defeats Goliath, the Philistines will serve Israel (1 Sam. 17:9). However, if Goliath defeats Israel's chosen warrior, Israel must serve the Philistines (1 Sam. 17:9). Observing the faith of David, his display of confidence plays a vital role. How? His faith in God can influence whether Israel obtains victory or becomes slaves to their enemies. Being that he, David, displays such confidence in the Lord to help him win the battle, the doubt of the king also plays a role. By his initial doubt, he is holding back someone who has the potential to deliver his countrymen from imprisonment and lead them into victory. Imagine the fear that captivates the hearts of Israelites. The faith or doubt of leadership can either cause the entire country to become captive not merely to their enemies, but the spirit of fear as well. God did not give Israel the spirit of fear, but of power, love, and of a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7). Saul and David's communication of faith and determination leads to the outcome of Israel: either liberation or captivity. Therefore, faith and doubt are actively engaging in the passage.

For instance, faith is progressing while doubt is regressing. In the passage, by faith, David is progressing in the sense that he is moving towards Goliath believing that he will obtain the victory over him. Meanwhile, doubt causes Saul to regress to an extent. Saul's words attempt to discourage David's progression towards the battle. While David attempts to progress towards victory, Saul attempts to cause him to regress because of the warfare that he is confronted with and because of his uncertainty about David's

capabilities. Therefore, the faith and doubt of Saul contribute to the fate of Israel. The faith of leadership in the passage influences the outcome of their followers.

Additionally, in the passage, faith is a display of confidence while doubt was a display of hesitancy. David displays a confidence in the Lord to approach Goliath.⁸ Saul, on the other hand, displays a sense of hesitancy because a young boy has now offered to do what his soldiers are hesitating to do. The faith of David is moving Israel towards experiencing the victory and the solution that they require. David demonstrated a faith in God to provide the victory.⁹ The hesitancy of Saul is holding back the victory and the solution that Israel is searching for in the text.

The faith and doubt in the text also reveal the focus of these two individuals. By operating in faith, David is focused on the Lord's power. By operating in doubt, Saul's focus is on Goliath's power. What will be seen in the remaining portion of this pericope is that David's confidence is rooted in the Lord's support shown to him in his past battles (vs. 34-37). On the other hand, Saul's focus is on the expertise of the Philistine giant. Hence, the question that is in Saul's mind is, "How can this young boy defeat a man who has been trained in war since his youth (vs. 34)?"

Faith in this passage is demonstrated by David's progressing towards the battle. His progression is a sign of confidence in the Lord His God. This display of confidence is due to his focus on the Lord's capability to provide victory.¹⁰ Saul's doubt causes him to initially regress from approving of David's requests. Therefore, his doubt results in a

⁸ David Hadley Jensen, *The First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 114.

⁹ William Garden Blaikie, *The First Book of Samuel* (New York, NY: G. H. Doran, 1912), 288.

¹⁰ Francesca Aran Murphy, *I Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible, 2010), 308.

demonstration of hesitancy to allow David to go into war. His doubt is strengthened by his comparison of David to the expertise and credentials of Goliath. The significance of faith and doubt is that they both carry the potential to determine the outcome of Israel, which contributes to the historical account of Israel and God's faithfulness to them. The faith of David and the doubt of Saul is a part of the process of the Lord providing victory to the people of Israel.

The Assurance

In addition to faith and doubt, assurance is another element that is present in this passage within verses 34-37. In these verses, David explains the strength of his confidence in God. David mentions the following in verses 34-37:

But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God." David said, "The LORD, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." So, Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you!" (1 Sam. 17:34-37).

David recalls the protection of the Lord that he experienced in the past. From this experience, David provides his experience as a means of training and preparation for the combat that he is embracing. From his recollection of the past, David recalled how the Lord delivered him from the bear and lion that he faced. Believing that the Lord will do it again, he boldly confesses his faith to Saul the king.¹¹ This portion of the narrative includes elements of remembrance, deliverance, and confidence. David's recollection of

¹¹ Graeme Auld and Jennifer K. Cox, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 210.

his deliverance is what fuels his confidence in the Lord. The application is that recalling the faithfulness of God is what strengthens the faith of the young lad in the text.

Therefore, remembering the faithfulness of God and knowing that the Lord will always be faithful is what strengthens and stabilizes the confidence of David. Therefore, Saul's response is simply, "Go, and may the Lord be with you (vs. 37)!"¹²

Additionally, David's past experiences with the lion and bear are similar to the case scenario that he is currently confronted with. For example, just as he had to defend his sheep, he is now faced with the task of defending Israel.¹³ Robert Alter mentions how "David's carefully contrived speech proclaims his tested courage and strength."¹⁴ David's past occurrences reveal his capability to protect and fight for those who are not powerful enough to overcome their enemies. As the lion and bear attempted to devour sheep, David protected and fought for the sheep because they were incapable of defending themselves against these ferocious creatures. In the same manner, Israel stands incapable of finding someone who can defend themselves against Goliath. As David points to the faithfulness of the Lord, he is also validating his ability to protect and fight for Israel. Therefore, the ability of David to protect and fight for the weak strengthens his claim of the Lord's affirmation in his life.

Notice the initial doubt of Saul did not discourage the faith of David. David stood on the past actions of the Lord believing that he was able to replicate those actions and outcomes of deliverance. David recalled how God affirmed him and trusting in His

¹² Auld and Cox, *I and II Samuel*, 210.

¹³ Malcolm Gladwell, *David and Goliath* (New York, NY: Hachette Book Group, 2013), 5.

¹⁴ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York, NY: Norton, 2000), 106.

faithfulness expected his affirmation again in this battle. For David, this was just another battle; instead of facing a lion or a bear, he would be facing a giant of a man.

Nonetheless, in the eyes of David, the giant was conquerable because he believed that the Lord would help him to overcome him as he has done before.

The assurance that David has is based upon the behavior of the Lord, the unchanging character of the Lord, the strength of the Lord. The behavior of the Lord has been present, to deliver from danger according to the account of David. The case scenario that Israel finds itself in is one of needing deliverance from dangerous enemies. In David's testimony, how the Lord has supported him is by his delivering power. The deliverance of the Lord has been the behavior of the Lord in the situations that David has faced in the past while combating wild animals. Hence, David's confidence in God to affirm him is based upon his past actions.¹⁵

Secondly, David's confidence in God's affirmation is based upon the Lord's unchanging character. His character is connected to his behavior mentioned above. God does what he does because of who He is; He delivers constantly because he is faithful. He delivers faithfully because he is faithful to deliver. In essence, what this portion of the text highlights is the consistent faithfulness of the Lord that is shown. God was faithful to save David from a ferocious lion; secondly, the Lord then saved David from a bear. Now, as the young boy encounters a Philistine giant once again threatening his life, David expectantly awaits the Lord's faithfulness to manifest again. Therefore, he bases his hopes on the faithfulness of the Lord to him. This is why David says, "The LORD,

¹⁵ Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart* (Fearn, UK: Focus on the Bible, 2000), 185.

who saved me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine (vs. 37).”

David’s confidence is not only based on the behavior and character of God, but also His strength. David’s statement about the Lord’s capability highlights his confidence in the strength of God. David has seen the strength of the Lord in his previous occurrences; therefore, he points to the fact that God is mightier than the giant that he is confronting. David believes that the strength of God is great enough to provide him the victory against Goliath. The confidence of David is based upon the Lord’s affirmation. The Lord reveals his affirmation of David through the deliverance he provides (his behavior), his faithfulness (his unchanging character), and his strength (the strength to help David win).

Within verses thirty-four through thirty-seven, David is articulating the reasoning for his confidence in God’s power. Through his statement, he lays out what he has seen God do on his behalf and uses this as a basis for his confidence. In his confidence, David does not merely affirm that God can; but that God will deliver him. This is the demonstration of his assurance; he articulates a guarantee that God will deliver him out of the dangerous hands of Goliath. His guarantee is based upon the following elements that have been discussed: the behavior, faithfulness, and strength of the Lord God.

The ending portion of verse thirty-seven articulates very little. Saul has fewer words to speak as a rebuttal to David’s response. The significance of this matter is that when faith is strengthened by assurance, doubt loses its power. The initial doubts of Saul were spoken in response to David’s proclamation of faith in the Lord God. After David has articulated the assurance that he has in the Lord, Saul’s words of doubt begin to

cease. Saul replies with words that are void of doubt saying, “Go, and may the Lord be with you!” David’s words of faith appear to have transformed Saul’s words of doubt into words of hopefulness. As a leader of David’s country, Saul began to affirm God’s presence with David as his hope, which is an example of providing a positive affirmation. The hope of God’s presence articulated by king Saul serves as a reminder to David of where his hope of victory lies and that is in God. What is seen in the text is that when faith is proclaimed and solidified by assurance, doubts begin to transform into hope.

The exchange between David and Saul appears to be one revealing this matter: an exchange of faith and subtle doubt. What this refers to is that once faith was proclaimed, doubt was proclaimed to oppose faith. When doubt is proclaimed, it can impact the strength of a person’s faith. However, when faith is built upon what God has done and is doing, it enables the believer to have confidence in what God will do. Therefore, in the face of doubt, faith is strengthened when it is established upon what God did and is doing.

The Assistance

The next element that is present within the text is the assistance of Saul. After David has validated his claim with the assurance of God’s affirmation, Saul offers him his armor to battle Goliath. What this verse reveals are the insufficiency of Saul’s assistance. What the text reveals about Saul’s assistance is that it did not help, but hindered the work that David was attempting to do. Ralph Gehrke mentions a similar point: “Again a touch of humor is added to the story when we see how Saul wants to lend David his own armor. It does not fit David; it is in fact a hindrance to him, not merely

militarily, but religiously, since the Lord's champion did not need the royal helmet and coat of mail."¹⁶ Saul's attempts to assist were not a part of the Lord's plan nor did it aid David in the warfare he was preparing for.¹⁷

Secondly, Saul's assistance was stifling not strengthening. A third observation to make about this occurrence is that Saul's assistance was weighing David down not building him up. These three matters will be further discussed as this verse is examined. However, it is also necessary to consider that this case scenario does not imply that the assistance of others is of no use; but it does imply that the affirmation of God is sufficient. In other words, whatever God led David to do in the text; He would also equip David with what he needed to defeat Goliath.

Concerning these three observations, the first is necessary to consider. Though Saul's attempt to provide David armor may have been to help David, it was something that David was not used to wearing and operating in. Verses thirty-eight through thirty-nine says the following, "Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them" (1 Sam. 17:38-39). Saul clothed David with the armor of a warrior, yet his efforts proved to be unhelpful because David could not walk in it.¹⁸ Therefore, the text implies that Saul's efforts did not help but

¹⁶ Ralph David Gehrke, *First and Second Samuel* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publisher House, 1968), 147.

¹⁷ Feidhlimidh Magennis, *First and Second Samuel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 18.

¹⁸ Eugene Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 1999), 98.

hindered David from comfortably operating the way that he would need to in warfare. The significance of this scenario is that the text reveals the uniqueness of David's warfare methodology. David was not going to engage in warfare as the typical warrior. David would not approach Goliath with a sword, spear, or any armor. Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg mentions that "the Lord means to overcome the heavily armed giant not by an armed man, but by an unarmed man."¹⁹ The peculiarity of David's fighting style heightens the need for the Lord to show his strength in providing David victory over a warrior, who is equipped with all that David has been offered.

Additionally, David's response can be seen as a response of faith implying that the affirmation of the Lord is enough to obtain the victory. Saul's assistance was also stifling instead of strengthening. The significance of this observation is that by operating as Saul requested, David's strength was more likely to be stifled. Therefore, as he attempts to function with the armor on, he needed to say, "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them (1 Sam. 17:39)." One could imply that the armor impacts the strength and energy that a warrior uses while engaged in warfare.

The importance of this observation is to notice that maintaining the armor that Saul offered could have resulted in David utilizing strength and energy to carry something that is not helping him win the war. Essentially, if David kept the armor on, he would use energy as well as strength to bear the weight of something that he was not used to and that could drain his energy. If David waged war according to the expectations of his king, the armor would not help his strength but stifle it because of the energy it took to carry the weight that he was not used to.

¹⁹ Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *1 and 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1964), 152.

A final observation in this portion of the text is that Saul's assistance was putting unnecessary weight on David instead of providing adequate preparation. The text emphasizes the necessity of David being free enough to move and operate as necessary to war against Goliath. The armor appears to have caused David to operate in a way that he was not comfortable with. Therefore, it was necessary for him to lay it aside, which serves as a lesson in itself. Perhaps, the point of his laying aside the armor is to emphasize that whatever adds weight or does not help to fulfill the calling of God is worthy of being laid aside.

A Decline

The rejection of armor points to David's unique warfare style as well as his faith in the Lord. The rejection of the armor implies that the affirmation of God is enough.

Kuruvilla continues to emphasize the following about David's warfare strategies:

To that David countered that he was actually "not able to go" with armor and helmet and sword (17:39). And so he proceeded to take them all off. The interlude of 17:38-39, David's donning and doffing of Saul's armor, comic though it is, conveys an important facet of the theological thrust of this pericope: the repudiation of the ideology of arms: impressive firepower would not be the objects of his trust (500).²⁰

David's rejection implies a trust in God and not in weaponry. His faith is displayed as one that is reliant upon the strength and sufficiency of the Lord God. Robert Bergen emphasizes a similar notion:

The weapons David gathered for use against Goliath- the stick and the stones- were not products of human artifice; rather, they were shaped by God. As such, the author may have included these details as a counterpoint to 13:19-22; the Philistines feared and relied on weapons pulled from human forges, but David

²⁰ Kuruvilla, "David V. Goliath (1 Samuel 17)," 500.

would conquer them with divinely manufactured weapons. Armed with these provisions, David “approached the Philistine.”²¹

David’s warfare strategy points to the sufficiency of God’s assistance. Though God does use others to help his servants, the Lord does not require any additional help. Whatever God provides to win the battle is sufficient. Additionally, the text also shows the peculiarity of God through the uniqueness of David’s warfare. What is unique about this portion of the text is that David rejects the armor, sword, and helmet offered to him. How strange it is to reject the tools that appear to be what is needed to engage in warfare.

Perhaps, the significance of this point is to know that it is not the armor that is necessary to win the war. The support provided by the Lord God is the necessity required to win the war. The peculiarity of God in these verses stress that armor, a sword, nor a helmet guarantees the victory. The victory of the battle belongs to the Lord God.

By David’s rejection, he is demonstrating confidence in his unique warfare style, in himself, and his God. As previously mentioned, his warfare style is unique because he is approaching a warrior without the usual elements that a warrior uses in warfare. Additionally, the text goes on to mention in verse forty that he is using a sling and five smooth stone to combat a giant of a man who is also a trained warrior. Hence, David is demonstrating confidence in the sufficiency of his warfare strategy. Therefore, David is demonstrating faith that his warfare style is sufficient to defeat Goliath in battle.

Secondly, David by rejecting Saul’s armor and sword is also demonstrating faith in himself. David’s demonstration of rejection communicates self-confidence. He shows that he believed that he did not need anyone else’s armor to defeat Goliath. He

²¹ Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 194.

demonstrated confidence in himself to overcome the Philistine giant. The implication is that David demonstrates that he is comfortable fighting from an unorthodox standpoint. He demonstrates that God's ways do not always resemble how others would approach the situation that he is confronted with. Perhaps, David's approach to warfare appeared strange to Saul; hence, the king offered him armor and equipment to face the giant. Saul provided David what he believed David would need to win the fight against Goliath. The unorthodoxy of David's battle strategy shows that victory was not based upon the equipment of the soldier, but the divine support of the soldier.

An additional observation is that David's rejection of Saul's armor and equipment is a sign of his faith in God. David prepared himself to approach the giant not with any equipment, but in the name of the Lord his God. David throughout this pericope articulates his confidence in the Lord God to provide him the victory over Goliath. Therefore, his efforts to combat Goliath are dependent upon the strength of God. David's unshakable faith communicates a dependence upon the Lord and that David is incapable of obtaining victory unless the Lord intervenes.

The declaration of David's faith communicates to the reader that God can do the impossible. Furthermore, his faith articulates that God is not only able to do the impossible but will complete this seemingly impossible task. In response to the faith of David, he is confronted with what appears to be a doubtful perspective. The doubtful response of the king does not stifle David's faith in the Lord, however.

A Position

David lays hold to the assurance that God not only can but will help him in his battle against Goliath. The claim is based upon the previous actions and intervention of God on his behalf. Believing that God is faithful to replicate what he has done in the past, David expects God to help him overcome another challenge. In response to the faith of David, King Saul attempts to assist David in his attempts to combat the Philistine giant, Goliath. The armor and equipment provided to David left him unwilling to engage in warfare with what Saul gave him. Therefore, the rejection of Saul's armor communicates that his efforts served as an unnecessary additive. In his declining to utilize Saul's equipment, the text reveals that even in warfare, the Lord's ways are not like the ways of a human being (Is. 55:8).

Moving towards verse forty, the text communicates that David's faith is lively and active. The faith of David moves him towards action. The scriptures teach that faith without works is dead (Jam. 2:17). The apostle James says the following in James 2:14-17:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead (Jam. 2:14-17 NRSV).

The apostle articulates that the genuineness of a person's faith is validated by the demonstration of actions. The apostle emphasizes that the faith that God calls for involves acting, especially because of the conditions that a believer sees others in. The principle in James correlates with what is seen in the scenario of David.

The faith of David is one that is responsive to the condition of his countrymen. The condition of the Israelites armies is that they are perhaps captivated by fear and worry as they anticipate finding who can overcome their enemies. In response to faith, David does what no one else has been willing to do at this point: approach the Philistine. David's faith communicates that he has the faith to address what troubles his fellow countrymen. The faith of David caused him to progress towards the Philistine in battle with the assurance of God's affirmation. This final verse within the following passage provides insight into the demonstration that is following the declaration of David's faith amid the battle with the Philistines.

David's faith has now shifted from mere declaration to a demonstration of confidence in God. What David brings to the battle along with him is what fuels his faith. While approaching Goliath, David comes to battle with a reminder of his past victories, an expectation for God's presence, and the courage to press forward. Each of these points is connected building upon one another. The significance of these points is that they are the demonstration and manifestation of a living faith that is reliant upon the Lord God.

An initial element that David brought into battle was a reminder of the Lord's past provision. The importance of David taking this reminder into battle is that it carried the potential to fuel his faith in God while engaged in warfare. The reminder serves as a resource to encourage David to believe in the Lord's faithfulness. The previous faithfulness of the Lord God encouraged David to believe in His faithfulness to him even in that moment of the war.

Within this portion of the passage, the motivation of faith is just as significant as faith itself. What this means is that what influences the faith of David holds significant weight. David's faith has to be motivated by something for him to progress towards Goliath, a man who has the potential to take his life. David's faith has proven itself to be unshakable thus far within the text. Therefore, this portion of the text reveals that David's faith is an active, lively faith. With his faith appearing to be a lively one, the motivators for his faith are what empowers him to depend on God actively and consistently for the help that he needs. The motivation for his faith is the recollection of God's deliverance; this is seen in his previous battles with the lion and bear, which threatened the lives of his sheep.

In addition to a reminder, an expectation of God's presence motivates the faith of David. Notice, as David approaches the giant, he does so with simply a staff, stones in a pouch, and a sling. These elements may not seem helpful, but perhaps, this is a demonstration of dependence upon the Lord. Perhaps, coming with these tools is a sign of dependence on God to display his strength against Goliath on behalf of David. The expectation of God's presence empowers the faith of David to know that God is going to aid him in battle. The expectation is that God will manifest his presence to provide David victory over Goliath. The expectation that David has is that God will do what he did in the past. David expects the Lord to deliver him from experiencing defeat at the hands of Goliath.

A final motivator that strengthens the faith of David is the courage to press towards Goliath. The boldness of David empowers him to do what has yet to be done by any of the warriors of Israel. The boldness of David is what sanctifies him amid the

warriors of Israel. The boldness within him differentiated him from others. The boldness that he had was a sign of his faith and caused him to act boldly by approaching and ultimately defeating the Philistine giant as seen in verses fifty through fifty-one.

The Connections

Each of these elements motivates the faith of David as seen in this pericope. The significance of these elements is that they produce a living faith within David.

Remembrance fuels the faith of David to believe that God can and will do what he has done in the past. Therefore, by remembering what God has done previously, recollection produces a sense of expectation within David. The expectation is that God will provide victory as he has done before. The expectation then begins to produce a level of courage that moves David to action, which is what is an active or lively faith. Lively faith refers to a faith that is not merely articulated but is ultimately demonstrated.

These figures are all fueled by confidence in the affirmation of God. The Lord's affirmation serves as the foundation for David's faith. This affirmation is what fuels these elements mentioned above. David's recognition of the Lord's affirmation is what produces confidence, courage, and the progression of David. His confidence in the support of the Lord caused him to function in an other-worldly boldness that led Israel to victory.

The affirmation of God is what eventually led David to act out his faith. The affirmation of God has greatly impacted the progression of David's faith. David initially started by declaring his faith; he then began to recognize the presence of God in his midst. Therefore, David begins to solidify his faith as he recognizes the presence of God

in his past situations. Having recognized the power of God that has manifested in his past battles, he begins to articulate confidence that God will manifest this same power in the upcoming battle. The closer he gets to Goliath, David's faith begins to transform into a demonstration. What the passage reveals is the significance of God's affirmation in this narrative. Affirmation serves as the foundation of faith in the text.

In this passage, as David shifts from declaring to demonstrating his faith, he demonstrates the attributes of a believer in the Lord God. This narrative consists of an acronym: F.A.I.T.H.: The first letter, F, stands for foundation; the letter A stands for aspiration; the letter I represents inspiration; T stands for trust, and H stands for humility.

Foundation pertains to the affirmation of the Lord. This affirmation is the foundation for David's faith as previously mentioned. The reasoning behind David's proclamation and demonstration of faith is the notion that God will support him in battle. God's work essentially is the foundation of David's faith. David's confidence is not merely in himself, but in the God whom he trusts.

After the text communicates affirmation as the foundation of faith, the text then communicates a sense of aspiration. Aspiration is a response to the affirmation of the Lord in the text. In other words, David's recognition of God's affirmation causes him to aspire for victory against the Philistine giant, Goliath. The connection between these two initial factors is that affirmation is the basis of faith; this foundational piece of affirmation produces a sense of aspiration. The affirmation of God puts David on a quest for victory and liberation. The implication is that when the presence, power, and grace of God are recognized, it provokes the believer to action. The presence of God with David encouraged David to act in faith; and therefore, move in a certain direction towards

Goliath to claim victory for himself and his people. Aspiration is necessary because this is the initial sign of active faith. Without aspiration, David's faith would be inactive and mere discussion. The element of aspiration serves as evidence that David's faith becomes a demonstrative faith instead of a merely declarative faith.

Additionally, inspiration is another element present within the text. Inspiration occurs when David recalls the presence of God in his life. As David recognizes affirmation, he then aspired for victory over Goliath because he was inspired by the faithfulness of the Lord. Referring to verses thirty-four through thirty-seven, David recognized the faithfulness and support of the Lord demonstrated towards him. In essence, as he remembered the reliability of God, he was inspired to pursue Goliath with the assurance that he would be victorious. David's inspiration was a result of his recognition of God's reliability. David's faith was based upon a strong foundation that caused him to pursue victory. Consequently, when viewing the validity and strength of his foundation, he was inspired to aspire for the victory of Israel.

Next, there is trust. After David has leaned upon the foundation of God's affirmation, he has aspired for something and is inspired to pursue it until it is in his grasp. Doing so involves trusting in God. Having seen the reliability of his God and being inspired to pursue victory, the only thing left for him to do is to trust in the Lord God. Trust is demonstrated through his consistent pursuit of victory over Goliath. The pursuit is done by faith not in his mere capability but in God's faithfulness to deliver him. As David approaches Goliath with his equipment, his staff, stones, and a sling, he is showing that he trusts God to give him the victory that he is pursuing.

In addition to trust, a final element in the text is humility. Though David displays a strong level of confidence in the Lord, it is also a sign of his humility. David's faith demonstrates that he is willing to depend on God for what he needs in the hour of battle. David could have taken the armor that was offered to him by the king; but instead, he depended upon the Lord for victory. His display of faith demonstrates a humbleness of mind; he communicates through his faith that victory is contingent upon the Lord's strength and his alone.

The faith of David consisted of recognizing a foundation of support. The foundation of support refers to depending on something or somebody mighty enough to help David win the battle against Goliath. Once David found the Lord's affirmation as a foundation to rely on, he aspired to defeat Goliath. Yet, the doubts of Saul, though not directed to the Lord, provided David an opportunity to test the validity and strength of his foundation. In other words, David was able to discern the strength of his faith's foundation due to the words of Saul. Saul's highlighting the strengths of Goliath caused David to examine whether God's affirmation was strong enough to support him in the battle against Goliath. The significance of doubt conflicting with faith is that it provides an opportunity to test the stability of faith's foundation and the strength of faith as well. As David recalled the reliability of God, he was able to concur that his source of faith (God's affirmation) was mighty enough to defeat Goliath.

Having been inspired to know that his source was mighty, his next challenge was to trust God. In this sense, the text now moves from seeing the testing of faith's foundation to the testing of faith's strength. Faith's foundation has been proven faithful and reliable; now the question is "How strong is faith itself?" Faith has a strong

foundation to stand on, but is it strong enough to stand itself? David is inspired by the reliability of God's affirmation and finds the strength to stand by faith in God. Therefore, David's consistency not only proves his foundation to be strong, but his faith in his foundation is proven to be strong also.

Having demonstrated that he has a strong foundation and faith, David begins to demonstrate trust in the Lord through his pursuit of Goliath. His display of trust is consequently a sign of his humility. He is counted as humble because of his dependence upon the Lord God for victory. The passage implies that faith is a demonstration of humility because faith requires trusting in the Lord for what is needed.

Conclusion

As mentioned in this chapter, the biblical narrative of David and Goliath displayed the how faith in God's affirmation empowered the young David to defeat a Philistine giant, Goliath. As a result, David walked in the victory, identity, and calling of a warrior. The passage has been examined by highlighting its historical, literary, and social context. The historical context pertains to the formation of Israel's government shifting from theocracy to one being governed by a human king named Saul, who was anointed by the Lord's prophet Samuel. Throughout the reign of Saul, his rebellion costs him the favor of the Lord. In the process of this occurrence, Saul and the armies of Israel encounter their Philistine enemies in need of salvation lest they live as slaves to their enemies. The passage reveals how the Lord works through a young shepherd boy named David, who brings salvation to the Jews and overcomes the Philistine's champion warrior, Goliath.

The literary context of this passage communicates the activity of God in the history of Israel. Throughout their history, the Lord God demonstrates an amazing level of faithfulness to Israel by saving them from their enemies. Amid their sins against the Lord, He still cares for them with powerful and holy care. The literary context serves as a historical record of God's salvation, faithfulness, grace, and judgment shown in the history of this nation.

The social context of this passage highlights the peculiarity of God's ways. Of all the people that God could have chosen to defeat Goliath, he chose a young boy. The choice of God communicates that God's ways are not like the ways of human beings. The Lord uses what others may consider unorthodox strategies to achieve His purposes. Hence, the significance of doing so is that it can produce a level of dependence on God to do what no other can do. Since God's ways are different than what human beings may do, humanity must learn to have faith in the Lord that His purposes may be accomplished even when His methodologies are not understandable.

The writer of 1 Samuel highlights the declaration of David's faith and the doubt that follows his declaration. In verse thirty-two, David declares confidently that he will fight the Philistine giant, Goliath. David's faith remains unshakable amid the king's doubt and uncertainty. David, nonetheless, believes that he can fight against Goliath with the assurance that God will affirm him in battle. In response to David's faith, Saul helps by giving David armor and a sword to use in battle. David was not used to the armor, and he laid it aside. As David declines to use the equipment from Saul, he maintains a position of confidence believing that God will provide him victory without the assistance of armor or a sword.

The faith of David is based upon the foundation of God's affirmation. As a result of faith in God's affirmation, David aspired to defeat Goliath. Furthermore, he is inspired to trust in the Lord having recalled the reliability of the Lord God. Therefore, as he trusts in the Lord, he demonstrates his humility. The story of David is one of faith triumphing over great challenges. Faith reliant upon the affirmation of God won the battle. This is the testimony of David, which provides a biblical example of how believing God's affirmations empowers youth to walk in the victory, identity, and calling that God has given them.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Having considered a biblical example of affirmation impacting the growth and development of youth, it is imperative to also consider a historical example of affirmation's impact on youth. Therefore, in this chapter, there is an examination of the development of Black YMCAs that is important to consider. In doing so, I will address the purpose, development, establishment, and impact of these organizations. As a result of this analysis, I will seek to correlate the development of Black YMCAs with the development of my church context, Bethel Missionary Baptist Church.

An initial goal of the founders of the African American based YMCA's was to enable African Americans to reach their "mental, moral, and Christian equality."¹ In its origin, the YMCA also known as "The Young Men's Christian Association was founded in London, England, on June 6, 1844, in response to unhealthy social conditions arising in the big cities at the end of the Industrial Revolution (roughly 1750 to 1850)."² Young men would come to London, England in search for employment due to industrial factors. Due to harsh conditions, young men within London did not have a house to live in. Therefore, these harsh conditions appeared safer than living within the streets of London.

¹ Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 18.

² The YMCA, "History – Founding," YMCA of the USA, <https://www.ymca.net/history/founding.html>.

These conditions were revealing a lack within the community. There appeared to be a need for a wholesome environment that would address the needs of young workers seeking safety and shelter in these harsh conditions.³

Within the 1840s, George Williams was working in the department of sales. He along with his fellow coworkers organized a group that would provide Bible studies and prayer for those who were living in the streets of London. This gathering birthed the formation of the Young Men's Christian Association, known today as the YMCA. Within the following decade there were more than twenty YMCAs in Great Britain. In this same time frame, a YMCA was developed in North America.⁴

As the development of YMCAs progressed, the first African American YMCA was formed in 1853 by a man named Anthony Bowen. What is unique about the formation of this organization is that it is an organization started by evangelicals that would begin to address the social needs of the communities they were planted within.⁵ Furthermore, the formation of Black YMCAs was a pivotal step for the YMCA because it caused the United States of America to address the social dilemma of racism and injustice.⁶

The relevance of the development of Black YMCAs to the context of Bethel is that it addresses the necessity to support minorities to improve the overall community. This chapter will unveil the process of developing a wholesome environment that would lead to addressing injustice to improve equality within the community.

³ The YMCA, "History – Founding," <https://www.ymca.net/history/founding.html>.

⁴ The YMCA, "History – Founding," <https://www.ymca.net/history/founding.html>.

⁵ The YMCA, "History – Founding," <https://www.ymca.net/history/founding.html>.

⁶ The YMCA, "History – Founding," <https://www.ymca.net/history/founding.html>.

Within this chapter, I will examine the formation of the Black YMCA. The significance of this movement is that it emphasizes how minority ethnicities addressed mistreatment and injustices demonstrated towards them with Christian principles. The movement serves as an example of a generation of African Americans who sought to equip their people with necessary tools to thrive amid injustice and unrighteousness in their society.⁷ These leaders sought to mentor others in a way that exemplified the character of Christ Jesus.⁸ The development of the YMCA was meant to “address unhealthy social conditions.”⁹ Similarly, African Americans sought to address unhealthy social conditions, such as inequality, which impacted the freedoms of African Americans in their surrounding communities.¹⁰ Therefore, I am going to address four matters which contribute to the formation of this organization. A conclusion that I will address is that the formation of Black YMCA’s was designed to help equip those disadvantaged by the social conditions of that day to progressively move towards equality.¹¹ This move towards equality is also considered a step towards demonstrating a love of Christ, which transcended racial barriers.¹²

Throughout this analysis, I will address the initial development, purpose, establishment, and impact of the Black YMCA. By examining the establishment of this

⁷ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 129.

⁸ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 18.

⁹ The YMCA, “History – Founding,” <https://www.ymca.net/history/founding.html>.

¹⁰ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 129-130.

¹¹ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 18.

¹² Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 41; David Richard Porter, “History of YMCA-Church Relations in the United States,” *Theology Today* 3, no. 1 (April 1946): 131, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001398802&site=ehost-live>.

organization, I will analyze the circumstances that influenced the formation of a YMCA formed by African Americans. Additionally, I will mention locations of Black YMCA's as well as the initial processes involved in the formation of them. Secondly, I will elaborate on the purpose of developing Black YMCA's. By doing so, I will examine the motives and cultural dilemmas that moved leaders towards this initiative. Third, the progressive development of Black YMCA's will be mentioned. The analysis of this development will consist of revealing the development of leadership and African Americans who became a part of this organization. Lastly, the impact of this development will be addressed. By examining the impact, the initial development of this organization will reveal its effects on the present status of the YMCA developed by African Americans. The development of this organization by African Americans reflects the initial purpose of addressing the detrimental conditions of society through providing uplifting alternatives.

The Purpose

Concerning its purpose, Nina Mjagkij alludes to the purpose of this initiative.¹³ In her book, *Light in the Darkness*, she mentions how African Americans shared a common concern of the YMCA to “safeguard the morals of young, uprooted men in the city by surrounding them with a proper and wholesome environment.”¹⁴ In addition to this, a more in-depth purpose for African American leaders was to develop a Black YMCA to

¹³ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 18.

¹⁴ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 18.

work towards the “mental, moral, and spiritual improvement of their race.”¹⁵ This is how African American leaders sought to fulfill the overall goal of the YMCA. By African American leadership embracing their community with this mission “to move towards the mental, moral, and spiritual improvement of their race,” they were providing a way to safeguard the morals of their community.¹⁶ Through this attempt to improve their community, African Americans hoped to be treated equally with their Caucasian counterparts.¹⁷

The Development

Having solidified its purpose, it is necessary to notice the development of this organization. Though the YMCA did not oppose the formation of a Black association, the financial responsibility was contingent upon the contribution of African Americans.¹⁸ Mjagkij also states the following: “YMCA work for African Americans therefore depended almost entirely on the initiative and ability of African Americans to organize groups of young men and to raise sufficient funds among their own people.”¹⁹ Therefore, to bring a vision of hope to fruition, the labor rested on the shoulders of African American leaders at this time.

¹⁵ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 18.

¹⁶ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 18.

¹⁷ Addie W. Hunton, *William Alphaeus Hunton: A Pioneer Prophet of Young Men* (New York, NY: Association Press, 1938), 9-22.

¹⁸ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 3, 24.

¹⁹ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 17.

The development of this initiative was occurring in a time where African Americans were experiencing racial injustice. Mjagkij emphasizes that “many African Americans did not openly challenge Jim Crowism but instead began to advocate racial solidarity and self-help.”²⁰ This comment explains the actions of the African American initiative to develop a YMCA. African American leaders were attempting to develop a center to better their race in society. These leaders labored with the hope of empowering African Americans to “reach mental, moral and Christian equality.”²¹

Leaders within this initiative sought to provide their race a positive alternative that would lead them towards living an honorable life.²² Regarding its establishment,

The first black YMCA was established in 1853 before the Civil War occurred. Anthony Bowen was one of the primary African American leaders, who saw the necessity for a black YMCA. This early association was incorporated on 6 June 1892. Its first building at Twelfth Street, N.W. in Washington D.C. was dedicated on 12 May 1912, with African American citizens of Washington contributing \$27,000 toward the cost. In 1972, its name was changed from Twelfth Street YMCA to the Anthony Bowen Branch YMCA in honor of its founder and first president.²³

Throughout the time of Bowen’s work to develop a YMCA for African Americans, they experienced injustices, which hindered the progression of this development.²⁴

Furthermore, financial support and societal conditions, such as Jim Crow laws

²⁰ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 39.

²¹ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 35.

²² Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 35.

²³ University of Minnesota Libraries, “A Brief History of the YMCA and African American Communities,” University of Minnesota, <https://www.lib.umn.edu/ymca/guide-afam-history>.

²⁴ University of Minnesota Libraries, “Milestones in the History of African Americans and the YMCA,” University of Minnesota, <https://www.lib.umn.edu/ymca/guide-afam-milestones>.

contributed to the difficulties.²⁵ The progression towards developing a Black YMCA began to improve as African Americans began to find support within their communities.²⁶

African American leaders of the time sought to give the youth of their race an opportunity to develop morally, mentally, and spiritually to become honorable and productive citizens in society. The development of Black YMCA's is what contributed to moving towards these goals. For instance, Mjagkij mentions Booker T. Washington's comments on the initiative.²⁷ She mentions how "Washington applauded the 'strong, constructive and stimulating influences' of the YMCA."²⁸ The formation of Black YMCA's was the formation of an environment that would give African American youth an option to depart from spaces that would cause them to compromise their morality.²⁹

The purpose of developing a Black YMCA was to provide an environment that would contribute to the betterment of African Americans amid their societal circumstances. In the process of purchasing property for Black YMCAs one of the leaders of this initiative that is worth highlighting was William Hunton. He believed in gradually progressing towards equality. For instance, in the attempt to purchase property, Hunton solicited the assistance of his Caucasian counterparts; in doing so, his perspective involved seeking support from fellow professing Christians to support the progression towards racial equality. However, these efforts were two no avail. The efforts of Hunton

²⁵ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 39; C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America* (New York, NY: Association Press, 1951), 200, 211.

²⁶ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 39.

²⁷ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 18-41.

²⁸ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 41.

²⁹ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 41.

along with the African American community highlight the significance of affirmation the African American community at this time.³⁰

The Establishment

Regarding the establishment, the support of the African American community is what contributed to the formation of Black YMCAs. Therefore, this formation was a sign or manifestation of progressing towards racial equality.³¹ During this time, the African American community was treated as less than equal. From a biblical standpoint, this was a demonstration of injustice.³² Hence, their stride towards seeking fair treatment was not merely one of moving towards equality, but justice as well. The lack of support from Caucasian Christians in the YMCA highlighted the flaws within the organization³³. In addition to these efforts, Hunton also developed associations for African Americans. Yet, these efforts were insufficient in finding resources to purchase a building for Black YMCAs.³⁴ After the attempts of Hunton to obtain support for the purchase of property, the contributions of philanthropists were what contributed to the development of Black YMCA buildings.³⁵ A lack of support revealed a need for the assistance of fellow

³⁰ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 41-43.

³¹ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 3.

³² Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 41.

³³ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 43.

³⁴ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 39.

³⁵ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 5.

Christians and neighbors within the community.³⁶ Therefore, there are three noticeable flaws unveiled within the YMCA during this time.³⁷

An initial flaw was that the initial system of support for building YMCAs would result in African Americans' incapability to move towards the improvement of their communities and societal conditions. For instance, Hunton attended the YMCAs convention to seek support from others within the organization. During this time, the YMCAs were dependent upon the support of their surrounding community. Unfortunately, the African American community was not financially able to support themselves. Hence, the efforts of Hunton to seek support for his community were a necessity for the spiritual, moral, and mental advancement of the African American community.³⁸

The implication of not supporting the initiative of the African American community contributed to inequality and injustice amongst the YMCA as an organization. The implication of failing to support others during the time of Hunton's request at the YMCA convention could have fueled division amongst the body of Christ. How? By failing to support others in their efforts to move towards the spiritual, mental, and moral advancement of their community, division amongst Christians was a definite possibility and reality amidst Jim Crow policies. This would have implied a lack of Christian love that was yet to be demonstrated. Galatians 6:2 teaches the following, "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Supporting the

³⁶ William B. Kennedy, "Education in the World Ecumenical Movement," *The Ecumenical Review* 27, no. 2 (April 1975): 155.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0000750046&site=ehost-live>.

³⁷ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 43.

³⁸ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 43.

advancement of the African American community was an effort to fulfill the law of Christ. Therefore, to not partake in this action was to omit the demonstration of love that Christians are called to fulfill. The flaw within the YMCA during this time was an element of segregation that carried the potential to hinder the mission of the YMCA from being fulfilled, which was to address the societal conditions of the community.³⁹

Additionally, another potential flaw with the YMCA organization was that where there was a lack of support from the organization, the presence of Christian unity was hindered. How then could Christian unity have been strengthened if segregation and a lack of support for each other was permitted? In its origin, the YMCA was founded by Christians to help those in their community who were faced with harsh societal conditions, such as finding adequate shelter and safety while living in the streets of the community.⁴⁰ Therefore, one could contend that the organization's lack of support towards minority communities was in stark contrast to its original mission. Hence, the advancement of communities was not only at stake, but the purpose and mission of the organization as well.⁴¹

A final flaw in the YMCA during this time was that a lack of support for individual communities carried the potential to hinder the process of discipleship and mentorship.⁴² How? By not having a system in place to assist impoverished communities there was potential to hinder the process of discipleship and mentorship. The impoverished communities lacked the property where they could disciple and mentor the

³⁹ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 39.

⁴⁰ The YMCA, "History – Founding," <https://www.ymca.net/history/founding.html>.

⁴¹ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 43.

⁴² Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 3, 43.

people within their community. Providing an infrastructure that served as a wholesome environment was a part of the African American community's mission to advance towards the spiritual, mental, and moral progression of their people.⁴³ Therefore, the lack of support from Caucasian YMCA counterparts was a factor that carried the potential to stagnate the discipleship process of minority communities, such as the African American community.⁴⁴

Though these factors carried the capacity to delay the progression of the African American community, it is necessary to consider the factors of support that Caucasians, such as philanthropists and other contributors provided. For instance, the efforts of George Peabody contributed to the erection of a building for Black YMCAs in his hometown of Columbus, Georgia.⁴⁵ As Peabody assisted the Black YMCA initiative in his hometown, due to a compulsion to help his community, African Americans in this community were able to provide the sufficient funds to purchase property⁴⁶. Though Peabody aided with the initiative of African Americans in his hometown and Brooklyn, he did not provide resources for other African Americans when sought for his assistance.⁴⁷

Additionally, leaders of Caucasian associations sought the assistance of John Rockefeller, Sr. to provide funds to assist the African American community in

⁴³ The YMCA, "History – Founding," <https://www.ymca.net/history/founding.html>.

⁴⁴ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 3.

⁴⁵ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 68.

⁴⁶ Louise Ware, *George Foster Peabody: Banker, Philanthropist, Publicist* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1951), 520.

⁴⁷ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 69.

Washington D.C..⁴⁸ However, the delay of erecting this building was due to the failure of African Americans to contribute the funds that they initially pledged. Therefore, though there may not have been as much support from the Caucasian community, the efforts of Caucasian leaders to seek assistance for their African American counterparts is a step towards the progression of the entire community. To assist the impoverished minority community was to contribute to the overall development of the community.⁴⁹

For example, the contribution of John Rockefeller was incited by the efforts of S.W. Woodward, who was one of the leaders of a Caucasian association in Washington D.C. Nonetheless, Woodward articulated the need for African Americans to obtain a wholesome environment. The belief of Rockefeller was that determination and hard work was a necessary element for the impoverished to reach the goal of purchasing this property. Therefore, he provided a sum of money with the expectation that the African American community would match his contribution to obtain the property that they sought to own for their YMCA in Washington. Rockefeller was convinced by Caucasian leadership, who mentioned the need for a Black YMCA, that African Americans, who worked for the government had sufficient resources to match the offer that he made. In the process of matching the funding pledged by Rockefeller, African Americans began to pledge their financial contributions. However, the African American community did not provide the funds that they pledged for the erection of this building.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Robert Bremner, *American Philanthropy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 105-142.

⁴⁹ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 69.

⁵⁰ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 69.

Furthermore, in addition to the lack of funds provided by African Americans, the membership of Black YMCAs was increasing. Hence, Caucasian leaders in the Washington YMCA did not believe that the funds being raised would be sufficient for the property that African Americans were pursuing. Therefore, the funds intended to build a Black YMCA were used for another purpose unbeknownst to Rockefeller. He was informed of the misuse of his funds only after it was collected by Caucasian YMCA officials. Therefore, Rockefeller was upset and did not wish to contribute to the initiative of African Americans in the capital. Hence, the completion of a building in Washington D.C. was delayed till 1912.⁵¹

What is positive about this case scenario is that the contribution of Caucasian philanthropist serves as a sign of progression towards racial equality. Wherever there was a lack of support regarding the initiative of building a Black YMCA, there was likely to be a lack of opposition to racial inequality. Hence, the support of philanthropist, such as Rockefeller are a step towards the betterment of not merely African Americans, but the community of Washington D.C. as a whole. The support of those who do not have sufficient resources is what contributes to the betterment of the Washington D.C. community in the case scenario of Rockefeller.⁵²

What is problematic about this case scenario was the misuse of funds. By misusing the funds that Rockefeller contributed, the Caucasian YMCA leaders were at risk of stifling the betterment of the Washington D.C. community. In their estimation, the

⁵¹ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 69-73; Lewis E. Johnson, "Executive Secretary, Twelfth Street Branch, Washington, D.C. to Rockefeller, Jr., June 16, 1912," RF Archives, RG 2, box 36, YMCA, Washington, DC.

⁵² Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 69, 73.

funds would not be sufficient for the building that African Americans were seeking to purchase. Yet, by not discussing their newfound plan with Rockefeller, his willingness to contribute to the initiative was impacted. The results of these actions were that the progression towards equality and the advancement of the community was slowing down due to the misuse of funds and form of stewardship.⁵³

Following involvement with Rockefeller, African Americans encountered another philanthropist, Julius Rosenwald, who would help build a Black YMCA in Chicago. Rosenwald demonstrated a conviction to utilize his resources to help others. Like Rockefeller, he was a proponent for diligence and hard work. Furthermore, as a Jewish man, he identified with the injustices and inequality demonstrated towards African Americans. Rosenwald believed that to better the community involved helping the African American community. Therefore, he contributed financial resources with the condition that African Americans would provide financial resources to obtain the property that they sought for Black YMCAs. Rosenwald's contributions led to the development of multiple YMCA buildings for African Americans. Therefore, his efforts helped the progression towards racial equality and communal advancement.⁵⁴

As a result of these interactions amongst African American and Caucasian leaders in the YMCA, there was a certain impact on their interactions amongst one another. For instance, when it came to interracial dialogue, both parties were willing to participate. However, due to a lack of combatting injustices demonstrated towards African Americans, interactions amongst these parties were limited. For example, if there was no

⁵³ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 69, 73.

⁵⁴ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 74-76; Bremner, *American Philanthropy*, 105-142.

intentional effort, on the part of Caucasian neighbors, to strive for the fair treatment of African Americans, the interracial dialogue would merely be limited to dialogue and segregated organizations.⁵⁵

The significance of this matter is that it could have been interpreted as stagnating the progression towards racial equality. Therefore, stagnating racial equality through a failure to oppose Jim Crowism was also stagnating the progression towards Christian unity. In other words, until African Americans would receive fair treatment and not be victims of Jim Crow policies, there would appear to be a limitation on the advancement of the community. The community involved the privileged and the disadvantaged.⁵⁶

The impact of not opposing Jim Crow laws resulted in a limited progression towards the betterment of the community. By observing the participation of Caucasians to support the initiative of building Black YMCAs there was a sign of progressing towards unity. Though it was necessary for African Americans to support their own initiative to build a wholesome environment for their community, it was essential for those who were a part of these communities to support these initiatives. Supporting the development of African American YMCA was essential because the purpose of the YMCA was to provide a wholesome environment that would result in the advancement of the community and not the diminishment of it.⁵⁷

This way of support was also a sign of unity amongst people from different origins. The rich and the poor, the advantaged and the disadvantaged came together to

⁵⁵ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 101.

⁵⁶ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 101.

⁵⁷ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 101.

improve the societal conditions of the community. The matter of supporting the development of Black YMCAs was not merely about race. Providing this support was about a commitment to improve the societal conditions of communities where the YMCAs were present.⁵⁸

The Impact

The impact of the Black YMCAs was that in the presence of Jim Crow laws, there was a sense of progression regarding in the initiative to build these facilities, but a need to continue to progress towards racial equality as previously mentioned. This is a reference to progressing towards the development of Black YMCAs while experiencing the presence of Jim Crow laws. There was a progression towards racial advancement, but the progression was occurring amid the presence societal injustice demonstrated towards minorities, such as the African American community in this case.⁵⁹ Amid Jim Crow laws, as the need for interracial dialogue occurred, African Americans engaged in conversation with Caucasians. However, it was necessary to address that these laws were hindering the progression towards unity, racial advancement, the betterment of the community, and the unity of Christians.⁶⁰

As a result of the presence of Jim Crow laws, the interaction between African American YMCAs and Caucasian YMCAs was limited. For instance, in the book, *Light in the Darkness*, Mjagkij emphasizes how “Jim Crowism had forced African Americans

⁵⁸ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 101.

⁵⁹ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 101.

⁶⁰ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 101.

to establish separate YMCAs (104).”⁶¹ The significance of this statement is that it demonstrates the division that remained as the presence of Jim Crow laws remained culturally influential in the lives of both the Caucasians and the African American community. Mjagkij goes on to share that the Black YMCAs became “safe havens for African American men, shielding them from racial humiliation and helping them to preserve their dignity.”⁶² This point of emphasis highlights that African Americans settled for segregation because there was not yet a visible support from their Caucasian counterparts to oppose the injustices of Jim Crow laws.⁶³

A reason for the lack of opposition towards Jim Crow laws was because of the costliness involved with this opposition. For instance, Mjagkij highlights that Caucasians were likely to lose business or strong levels of support when opposing the systemic structure of Jim Crow laws. Therefore, the costliness associated with opposing these laws could impact people’s livelihood, family, and well-being. Therefore, it is a reality that confronted people who may have had any inclination to stand against injustice.⁶⁴

In view of this present reality, the YMCA held a global conference. The conference involved conversation centered around the matter of addressing the Jim Crow laws that became a part of the fabric of the American culture at the time. During the time of the Great Depression in 1930s, African Americans were uncertain about their employment. Therefore, during this time frame, Jim Crow policies also impacted the

⁶¹ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 101; Hope Papers, “The Twentieth National Conference, Colored Men’s Department, YMCA of North America,” December 4, 1921, Cincinnati, OH, 4-5, reel 12.

⁶² Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 104.

⁶³ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 104.

⁶⁴ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 120.

assurance of minorities when thinking about their job security. Within the global conference held in the United States, delegates reached a conclusion concerning the racial tension within the country. Mjagkij emphasizes the following concerning the delegates decision: “765 delegates unanimously passed a resolution condemning racial discrimination and called for an end to segregation in the YMCA.... Although the resolutions weren’t binding they were something to come to terms with.”⁶⁵ The decision to bring an end to discrimination highlights that the YMCA, as an organization, realized the detriment and division that would hinder its mission and purpose as an organization.⁶⁶

As previously mentioned, the dilemma that Caucasians faced was the costliness of bringing Jim Crow policies to an end. Doing so could have potentially impacted a person’s livelihood. According to Mjagkij, the officials in the Caucasian YMCA were fearful of division occurring due to compliance with desegregation. Therefore, there was tension and hesitancy amongst Caucasians. By the 1950s, most YMCAs had open membership, which allowed access for all despite their ethnicity.⁶⁷

What the formation of Black YMCAs revealed was the significance of affirmation in the process of discipleship. The affirmation that took place would be supporting the development of African American YMCAs and thereby validating the significance of improving the societal progression of the African American community to improve the community as a whole. Affirmation within the formation of Black YMCAs involved others participating in helping form Black YMCAs. To affirm the significance of African

⁶⁵ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 121-122.

⁶⁶ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 121-122.

⁶⁷ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 121-127.

Americans advancement in the community involved supporting the initiative to form a wholesome environment for their community. Furthermore, affirmation involved addressing the Jim Crow laws that hindered the progression of the community. For there to be a progression towards the betterment of communities, injustice had to be addressed as it was in the global conference for the YMCA. The consequences of permitting Jim Crow laws were that it hindered not only the progression of African Americans, but also the well-being of the entire community, which involved African Americans and their Caucasian neighbors.⁶⁸

The Connections

The correlation between this movement and affirmation with Bethel Missionary Baptist Church is that the affirmation of identity is what helped a community of African American youth develop in the past, as well as in the present, to progress towards fulfilling their purpose in life. Just as there was a need for affirmation in the African American community during the formation of Black YMCAs, there still is a need for African American youth to be affirmed throughout their process of discipleship. Affirmation, in this case, involves encouraging youth to move forward towards maturation in their relationship with God and utilizing their gifts for His glory. A result of this would be the betterment of the community as it was in the case of the African American community during the formation of Black YMCAs. Affirmation has the potential to not only help youth progress towards fulfilling purpose, but also strengthens their unity with the church of Jesus Christ. As affirmation occurs, unity occurs amid

⁶⁸ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 121, 127.

diversities.⁶⁹ Affirmation, in the case of the formation of Black YMCAs and youth at Bethel, serves as an encouraging element that navigates others through a process of transformation.

Conclusion

As mentioned within this chapter, the development, purpose, establishment, and impact of the formation of Black YMCAs are as follows. The development was initiated by Anthony Bowen.⁷⁰ The purpose of forming Black YMCAs was to provide a wholesome environment that would contribute to developing African Americans spiritually, morally, and mentally.⁷¹ This itself contributed to the development of a positive sense of personal identity for Blacks.

Along with Bowen were leaders, such as William Hunton. He played a major role in the establishment of Black YMCAs. He was working with other African American leaders, as well as Caucasian leaders in the YMCA to move towards developing Black YMCAs. However, the initial efforts of the African American community were to no avail.⁷² However, they did find success once encountering philanthropists throughout the country, who were willing to invest in the formation of Black YMCAs.⁷³ Through the

⁶⁹ World Council of Churches, "The YMCA, the Church and Christian Unity," *The Ecumenical Review* 10, no. 2 (January 1958): 190, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001454649&site=ehost-live>.

⁷⁰ University of Minnesota Libraries, "Milestones in the History of African Americans and the YMCA," <https://www.lib.umn.edu/ymca/guide-afam-milestones>.

⁷¹ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 41.

⁷² Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 39-43.

⁷³ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 69-76.

process of forming these institutions, the African American community was met with opposition that was manifesting as injustice and mistreatment. Injustice was due to Jim Crow laws, which hindered the progression of the African American community's efforts to build Black YMCAs and progress towards racial equality. Furthermore, the Jim Crow policies also hindered the betterment of communities throughout the United States of America. The impact of the formation of Black YMCAs was that its formation led to the exposure of America's hindrances of division, segregation, and Jim Crow policies. These factors hindered the mission of YMCAs from being fulfilled in their true nature.⁷⁴ A part of the YMCA's mission was to promote justice for all.⁷⁵ Hence, the formation of Black YMCAs not only revealed the problematic features within America, but also brought about a process towards desegregation.⁷⁶

This process was becoming fulfilled at the call of delegates at the global YMCA conference calling for an end to segregation. The impact of the formation of Black YMCAs was that it began to slowly progress towards the advancement of the African American community and the betterment of the country. The betterment of the country came because of the efforts to improve the societal conditions of the African American community.⁷⁷

The following historical movement is not merely about a matter of race but is revealing the impact of a community seeking to address its societal conditions. African

⁷⁴ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 101.

⁷⁵ "YMCA Affirms Its Christian Basis and Purpose," *The Ecumenical Review* 25, no. 4 (October 1973): 527, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0000741500&site=ehost-live>.

⁷⁶ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 101.

⁷⁷ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 121-122.

Americans and those who help them not only addressed its societal conditions when forming YMCAs but was also addressing the conditions of the country they lived in. Therefore, this historical movement has contributed to the differences seen in the United States today.⁷⁸

The correlation between this movement and the Bethel Missionary Baptist Church is that both highlight the significance of affirmation. When others are progressing towards improving their community, affirmation is what helps and strengthens them to fulfill their God-given purpose and contribute to the betterment of their communities. Opposing the progression towards betterment is what hinders the fulfillment of purpose, as well as the improvement of a society. Support and encouragement, however, are the elements present in both scenarios, which birth a historical transformation that people will always remember.

⁷⁸ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 121-122.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Considering the concept of affirmation impacting youth's maturation, the theological foundation for this chapter would be that of pneumatology. Pneumatology refers to the work of the Holy Spirit. Within this analysis of the topic, the work of the Holy Spirit is what this chapter addresses. The significance of the Holy Spirit's work is that it involves moving the believer towards walking in the identity and character of Christ. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit's work involves the endowment of gifts and abilities, as well as the confidence to use those gifts for the glory of God. Throughout this chapter, four elements were examined to include the main idea of pneumatology in the discipleship of youth and its impact on identity formation, the evidence of this theology in youth discipleship and identity formation, the analysis of pneumatology in this process, and the connection between pneumatology and youth discipleship in identity formation.

The Main Idea of Pneumatology

The main idea of pneumatology that this chapter focused on is to identify the work of the Holy Spirit in the formation of young disciples in Christ. The Holy Spirit is available to any heart that would receive the presence of God.¹ Hence, the main idea of pneumatology is to highlight the work of the Spirit in the establishment of the young

¹ Daniel Castelo, *Receiving the Spirit* (London, UK: Bloomsbury T and T Clark, 2015), 95-116.

believer's faith in Christ Jesus.² As the Spirit of God does so, pneumatology reveals the significance of the Spirit's ministry; the Spirit's ministry is to testify the truth of Jesus Christ, which bares positive outcomes for the believer's formation.

Regarding the concept of pneumatology in youth discipleship, the following activities of the Holy Spirit to be discussed are the affirmation, activation, and aspiration of the Holy Spirit.³ The importance of these elements is that they reveal the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of youth during the process of discipleship and the purpose of this ministry.

The Evidence of Pneumatology

By articulating these three works of the Spirit in youth discipleship, it is necessary to notice the evidence of these three works of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit's work is one of affirmation in the lives of youth. An essential part of Spirit's work is the affirmation of identity. This affirmation occurs by the Holy Spirit, establishing an understanding of who Christ is, what Christ says, and the grace to believe it. The Spirit's work involves teaching the believer about Jesus Christ. Jesus mentioned the following in John 15:26, "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf." Therefore, the Spirit of God testifies of Jesus Christ.⁴ The significance of the Holy Spirit's revelation is that it teaches that understanding oneself begins with understanding who the Creator is. The importance

² Jinhyok Kim, *The Spirit of God and the Christian Life* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2014), 135.

³ Joseph Cunningham, "John Wesley's Moral Pneumatology: The Fruits of the Spirit as Theological Virtues," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 24, no. 3 (2011): 275-293, <https://journals-sagepub-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/doi/pdf/10.1177/0953946811405909>.

⁴ Helen Bergin, "Pneumatology," *New Blackfriars* 80, no. 943 (1999): 413.

of knowing Christ is that this knowledge serves as the foundation of the believer's faith and identity.

Additionally, the Spirit of the Lord affirms the identity of believers by establishing an understanding of whom Christ says he or she is. When the Holy Spirit begins to teach the believer who Christ is, there is also an understanding of who the believer is. The believer's identity is understood as he or she learns of Christ because his or her character and identity reflect His. Therefore, the Spirit's work of affirming the believer's identity begins with the revelation of Christ and develops as the believer learns of his or her identity found in Christ.

The Holy Spirit continues to build a solid foundation of identity through empowering the believer with grace. The Spirit of God gives grace to the believer to walk in their identity as a Christian. God's grace helps the believer walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7); this grace enables the believer to trust that what Christ has spoken concerning them is correct. Thus, the Spirit's work establishes not only an identity but produces godly fruit in the believer's life. The Spirit of God empowers believers to live according to their identity in Christ. Therefore, the result of doing so is bearing the fruit of the Spirit.

Joseph Cunningham alludes to this in his inscription relating to *John Wesley's Moral Pneumatology: The Fruits of the Spirit as Theological Virtues*. Cunningham explains how Wesley viewed the believer as becoming "a participant in God's nature" as he or she develops by the work of the Spirit.⁵ Cunningham also mentions that "Throughout Wesley's published corpus, righteousness, peace, joy, and love signified

⁵ Joseph Cunningham, *John Wesley's Moral Pneumatology* (Eureka, IL: SAGE, 2011), 277.

God's presence in the human soul and served as the external or empirical evidence of participation in the Spirit.”⁶ When the believer reflects the nature of God, he or she allows God to live in and through his or her being. This yielding of oneself is what allows Christ to live his life in and through the believer.

Cunningham explains that by the work of the Spirit, the believer begins to reflect the nature and character of Christ.⁷ When the Christian walks according to their identity in Christ, the love, righteousness, joy, and peace of Christ begin to manifest. Therefore, it is necessary to consider that the nature of Christ begins to reveal itself through the person submitted to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's work establishes an understanding of Christ and His identity in the believer's life. The Holy Spirit works to affirm the believer of who Christ is, as well as who he or she is.

Furthermore, the work of the Spirit involves the affirmation of identity and the affirmation of gifts and abilities. The Holy Spirit grants gifts to the body of Christ to use for the glorification of the Father (1 Cor. 12:1-9; Rom. 12:2-8). Thus, the Holy Spirit endows people with gifts to use; the Spirit of God then enables and supports believers in using their gifts to honor the Lord. The Apostle Paul shares with the church of Corinth that, “there are a variety of gifts that are given by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:4). The Spirit of God endows the believers with supernatural gifts and abilities. However, the Spirit of God works in the believer to utilize their gifts and abilities.⁸ This work involves affirming the gifts and abilities of the believer. Hence, the Spirit affirms through helping

⁶ Cunningham, *John Wesley's Moral Pneumatology*, 277.

⁷ Cunningham, *John Wesley's Moral Pneumatology*, 277.

⁸ Brad Price, *First Corinthians: "Let All That Ye Do Be Done in Love"* (Ebook: Brad Price, 2010), 503.

the believer to recognize his or her gifts. Also, the Spirit of God then affirms the believer by helping them utilize their gifts.

The ministry of affirmation is one of great significance when considering the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Through affirmation, the Spirit of God establishes a foundation of truth for the believer to build his or her identity. Furthermore, the Spirit of God begins to impart gifts; by doing so, the Spirit helps believers to recognize their gifts and molds them to utilize those gifts. The work of affirmation contributes to believers walking in their identity and giftings from the Holy Spirit. For instance, the Spirit's work is evident in the believer's life, such as in the case of Jesus' baptism. The Spirit of God descended upon him, and amidst the work of the Spirit in his life, He received the affirmation of Father (Matt. 3:17). God affirmed his Son, Jesus, thereby was confirming His identity as a child of God. In another example, the Spirit of God through the Apostle Paul affirms the gifts of God present within Timothy and encourages him through the Apostle Paul to utilize those gifts (2 Tim. 1:6). Hence, the Spirit's work of affirming believers' identity and gifts strengthens them to serve as effective disciples of Jesus Christ.

In addition to the work of affirmation, the Holy Spirit does a work of activation. Within this work of activation, two words occur to produce activation: an impartation and an initiation. There is first a work of impartation that the Holy Spirit performs. To activate a gift, the Spirit of God will initially impart a gift or gifts into the life of a believer (2 Tim. 1:6). The Spirit of God imparts or transfers God's gifts to equip the believer for service to the kingdom of God. For example, Wonsuk Ma writes an article entitled "When the Poor are Fired Up," which provides an example of the Holy Spirit's

impartation and initiation. For instance, Ma mentions how the Holy Spirit's work, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, notably, initiated a movement. This movement involved believers springing forth as missionaries to spread the Gospel and the message of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.⁹ Ma's example involves the Azusa Street Revival. During this time of revival, many believers sought and received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they received this gift or impartation from the Lord, the gift of the Holy Spirit's presence initiated a mission to share the message of Pentecostalism: the baptism in the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ Hence, this example of Ma's provides evidence that the Holy Spirit's activation starts with an impartation and then an initiation wrought by the Holy Spirit.

An additional example is Youth with a Mission (YWAM). This organization was started by Loren Cunningham, who sought to equip young people to go and spread the gospel. Cunningham aimed to shift youth from being the "ministered" to those who are "ministering." He hoped to equip Spirit-baptized youth to go forth and share the good news of Jesus Christ with others. His desire to equip youth serves as an example of what occurs in the believer's life after the Spirit's impartation and activation. Ma also mentions that Cunningham's training youth left a lasting impact on participants, who provide testimonies of the transformation that it brought to their lives.¹¹

⁹ Wonsuk Ma, "When the Poor are Fired Up: The Role of Pneumatology in Pentecostal-Charismatic Mission," *Transformation* 24, no. 1 (2007): 28-34, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/026537880702400105>.

¹⁰ Ma, "When the Poor are Fired Up," 30.

¹¹ Ma, "When the Poor are Fired Up," 30; YWAM, "History-Youth with a Mission," YWAM, <https://ywam.org/about-us/history/>.

As mentioned above, the impartation of the Holy Spirit would be the baptism in the Holy Spirit.¹² Frank Macchia mentions that the Holy Spirit's baptism is what occurs for those who put their faith in Christ. Macchia articulates the following:

At the base of Spirit baptism is a proclaimed promise of new life in Christ: "For the promise is for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2:39, NRSV). This promise was preached and received through repentance and faith. Therefore, it comes as a gospel of what God has done for us to give us new life in Christ.¹³

Macchia implies that the gift of the Holy Spirit's presence is a promise to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The promise can become a reality when a person turns in penitent faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. Macchia also emphasizes that receiving the Spirit of God is the possibility of repentance unto life (Acts 11:18).¹⁴ This principle's significance is that it reveals that a believer experiences the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ This experience occurs as believers embrace Christ and the things of Him with an open heart.

The gift of the Holy Spirit served as the impartation from God into the believer's life. Note that the gift of the Holy Spirit in each situation empowered people to bring others to Christ.¹⁶ The purpose of the Spirit's activation in the young believer's life is to equip them with gifts to bring others to Christ Jesus. The Holy Ghost's gift brings others to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ that they may become disciples for him.

¹² I. Leon Harris, *Holy Spirit as Communion* (Aberdeen University, 2014), 279.

¹³ Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 59.

¹⁴ Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 60.

¹⁵ Simeon Zahl, *Pneumatology and Theology of the Cross* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2012), 159-160.

¹⁶ Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney, *Advents of the Spirit* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2012), 387.

The Spirit's process of activation involves impartation and initiation. Impartation begins with God's depositing a gift within the believer's life to help him or her live as a witness for Christ. Additionally, the Holy Spirit works in the believer to utilize his or her giftings for the kingdom of God. Consequently, the Spirit of God works within the believer to utilize their giftings as a witness for Christ Jesus. Whether witnessing involved the working of miracles, healing, and the gospel's proclamation, the Spirit's presence and giftings help the believer point people to Christ.

About the Spirit's work of activation, there is also the work of aspiration. The Spirit's work of aspiration occurs by the Holy Spirit empowering and encouraging believers to utilize their giftings to glorify the Father in heaven. How? Through the word of God, the Spirit of God speaks a message that motivates and encourages believers to utilize what he or she has for the kingdom of God and the glorification of God. The Father receives glory through the fruit that believers bear; secondly, the Father receives glory as people come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ by utilizing their gifts and abilities. Both the fruit and evangelistic efforts of the believer are essential components that contribute to giving God glory. The Spirit of God desires what God the Father desires; therefore, the Spirit produces these desires within believers.

Concerning bearing fruit, John 15:8 mentions that God is glorified when believers bear the fruit of the Spirit. Additionally, as believers bear the fruit of the Spirit, doing so serves as a witness of his or her participation like God, as John Wesley mentions.¹⁷ Bearing the Spirit's fruit serves as an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to manifest the presence of God in and through the life of a young believer in Christ Jesus.

¹⁷ Cunningham, "John Wesley's Moral Pneumatology," 275-293, <https://journals-sagepub-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/doi/pdf/10.1177/0953946811405909>.

As believers bear the fruit of the Spirit, believers are to point others to Christ through evangelistic efforts. The evangelistic efforts of the believer are to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. This proclamation articulates to others that there is salvation from sin and hope for the hopeless because of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ Jesus. Hence, through this good news, believers invite others to place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to salvation their souls. However, bearing the fruit of the Spirit helps the testimony of believers in their proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The correlation between bearing the fruit of the Spirit and evangelism is that bearing the fruit of the Spirit contributes to the gospel's testimony. How can this be? The fruit of the Spirit in a believer's life serves as an indicator that the Spirit of Christ is present and active in a person's life to bring transformation. Therefore, the fruit of the Spirit serves as a testament to the power of the gospel. The fruit of the Spirit accompanying the Gospel's proclamation serves as a testimony revealing that the gospel has the power to save souls and change the lives of those who would believe it. The gospel is true and powerfully active in the believer. Therefore, this message of Jesus Christ accompanied by the work of the Spirit in a willing believer provides assurance and hope for the onlooker that God can transform their lives.

The traits and desires of the Spirit manifesting through the lives of believers yielded to God are what allow the Lord to bring deliverance and transformation to others' lives. The presence and gifts of the Spirit manifesting through believers are what points and draw others to Christ. For instance, in the case of gifts, Wonsuk Ma mentions the importance of Acts 1:8 in the evangelistic work of the body of Christ by saying:

For Pentecostals, one of the essential passages is Acts 1:8, 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in

Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ The coming of the Holy Spirit (or ‘baptism in the Spirit’ as they call it) is for empowerment. Empowerment is for witnessing.¹⁸

From Ma’s perspective highlighted in his article, “When the Poor are Fired Up,” he explains how based upon this text, the Holy Spirit’s baptism comes to empower the believer to witness Jesus as previously mentioned. The Spirit’s gift involves receiving the presence of the Holy Spirit along with the gifts provided with the Spirit’s coming as found in 1 Corinthians 12:1-9, such as prophecy, word of knowledge, and a word of wisdom. The Spirit of God’s gifts are to glorify God by pointing others to Christ and the salvation he provides¹⁹. Additional gifts granted by God are in Romans 12:3-8. In Brad Price’s commentary on 1 Corinthians, he mentions that the Holy Spirit endowed believers with the gifts mentioned in both passages.²⁰ The purpose of these gifts was to point others to the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The Spirit’s work inspires the believer to accomplish the goal of glorifying his or her Creator. Through the utilization of gifts, the young believer can glorify God by pointing others to Christ with their gifts. The evidence of this is in examples of missiology in Wonsuk Ma’s writings. The examples that Ma gives reveal God’s mission is to draw others to the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The presence of the Holy Spirit and the desire to see lost souls saved serve as gifts from God utilized to draw others to Christ and into the kingdom of God and submission to Christ as King.

¹⁸ Ma, “When the Poor are Fired Up,” 30.

¹⁹ Ernst Conradie, “Ecumenical Perspective on Pentecostal Pneumatology,” *Missionalia Southern African Journal of Missiology* 43, no. 1 (2015): 68.

²⁰ Price, *First Corinthians*, 503.

God's desires imparted into the hearts of young believers are what serve as the gifts of God. What this implies is that the gifts that Christ gives humanity are a portion of himself or his character. As people in Ma's article cooperated with the Spirit of God, they could fulfill the desire to save lost souls. They were able to produce a movement that would move towards accomplishing the purpose of God's salvation in the earth.²¹ Therefore, the Spirit's work of aspiration involves the Holy Spirit's encouragement to utilize the gifts of God as an invitation to others to come into a place of submission to the rulership of God.

The Analysis of Pneumatology

Regarding the analysis of pneumatology, the Holy Spirit's work is what contributes to the believer's knowledge and understanding. The work of the Holy Spirit contributes to the young believer's knowledge of their identity in Christ and their gifts and abilities. The heart of the matter is that pneumatology reveals that the Holy Spirit establishes this knowledge in the believer to help him or her progress towards becoming disciples of Christ. The Spirit's work of ministering truth to the human heart is what leads the young believer to understand who Jesus Christ is, as well as what he stands for. The Spirit of God ministers about who Christ is, and therefore, helps the young believer comprehend the attributes of God and the character of God. As the young believer learns the character of Christ, he or she begins to understand what Christ stands for. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the young believer begins to understand what is acceptable and unacceptable in the sight of Christ Jesus the Savior.

²¹ Wonsuk, "When the Poor are Fired Up," 28-34.

As youth learn about who Christ is and what he stands for, young believers can understand what he has spoken concerning them. As the Spirit ministers to the young believer about Christ, the Spirit of God begins to help, young believers understand their identity in Christ. The significance of doing so is that the Holy Spirit begins to minister to young believers that they are to reflect the character of Christ by the power of his Spirit. By doing so, the Spirit of the Lord empowers believers to reflect on what they have seen in Christ.²² Reflecting on the character of Christ is the work of the Spirit producing fruit in the lives of young believers as alluded to by John Wesley.²³ As young believers reflect Christ, they begin to reflect his righteousness, joy, and peace. Consequently, the young believer is walking in his or her Christian identity as he or she yields to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Additionally, to equip the young believer with knowledge, the Holy Spirit affirms the identity of the believer and the gifts of the young believer. God grants the young believer the Holy Spirit's presence along with the gifts and grace of the Spirit²⁴. The Holy Spirit lives in the believer willing to receive the presence of God and moves them to utilize their giftings. This work of initiation is a part of the Spirit's work to encourage and energize young believers to utilize their giftings to honor Christ.²⁵ Christ is honored as young believers exalt him; furthermore, he is exalted as young believers exalt him with the understanding that he is to receive glory throughout their lives. The Holy Spirit's role

²² Kathryn L. Reinhard, *Recognizing the Spirit: An Ecclesial Pneumatology* (Bronx, NY: Fordham University, 2015), 256.

²³ Cunningham, *John Wesley's Moral Pneumatology*, 275-293.

²⁴ Kevin Douglas Hill, *Athanasius and the Holy Spirit* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2016), 82.

²⁵ Anselm K. Min and Christoph Schwöbe, *Word and Spirit* (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2014), 40-41.

in the discipleship of youth involves providing revelatory knowledge of their identity in Christ, as well as the gifts that they have to glorify Christ.²⁶

By understanding this, the Spirit of the Lord helps the believer to recognize his or her gifts. Furthermore, recognizing their gifts, the believer is encouraged and empowered by the Spirit of the Lord to utilize those gifts. Michael Langford mentions that the Spirit of God is “missional.”²⁷ Furthermore, Langford explains that God has endowed the believer with gifts. Hence Langford says, “They are a pure gift, endowed for God’s mission of creation, reconciliation, and redemption.”²⁸ Note how Langford mentions three key elements: Creation, reconciliation, and redemption. His comments point to the purposes of God as one who is missional. Langford deconstructs the notion that God is distant. In fact, he explains through this phrase that God is not only present but actively intentional in the lives of youth.²⁹ What Langford refers to is that the purposes of God involve reaching into the world. The gifts of the Spirit and work of the Spirit are to reach others. Yet in reaching others, the Spirit’s work is to draw others. The Holy Spirit’s work in the believer is then to reach out and draw in. The Spirit of the Lord is reaching out to the world through the gifts utilized in the young believer. By reaching out, the Spirit intends to draw to Christ those to whom God has offered to help.

Therefore, Langford emphasizes that God has created the earth for his divine purposes and glory. Furthermore, Langford highlights how God has not only reached out

²⁶ James Daryn Henry, *The Freedom of God* (Lanham, MD: Fortress Academic, 2018), 43-78.

²⁷ Michael D. Langford, “Spirit-Driven Discipleship: A Pneumatology of Youth Ministry,” *Theology Today* 71, no. 3 (2014): 331, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573614542309>.

²⁸ Langford, “Spirit-Driven Discipleship,” 331.

²⁹ Langford, “Spirit-Driven Discipleship,” 332-336.

to create but to redeem.³⁰ Noticing the corruption of humanity, God actively extended a hand of salvation through Jesus Christ that humanity may be redeemed, which alludes to the sovereignty and immanence of God.³¹ Furthermore, Langford explains that God's additional purpose is to bring reconciliation.³² In other words, God is present and active to bring things back to its original place and order. Through the entrance of sin into the world, the relationship between God and humanity needed reparation (Rom. 5:12).

Nevertheless, the Spirit's reconciliation reveals that God is a God of relationship.³³ The Spirit's work unveils that by God reaching towards humanity, there is a desire for relationships to be restored. Therefore, the Holy Spirit's work of affirming, activation, and aspiring is the work of developing a relationship with young believers and working through them to develop a relationship with the remaining portion of humanity.³⁴

Langford's writings emphasize a deconstruction of the notion that God is uninvolved and only present for humanity. Langford elaborates that for there to be a development of impactful youth discipleship, there must be an emphasis that humanity was created for God and not God for humanity. In the discussion of cultivating impactful youth discipleship, Langford articulates that developing an understanding of the Holy

³⁰ Langford, "Spirit-Driven Discipleship," 331.

³¹ Langford, "Spirit-Driven Discipleship," 329-332.

³² Langford, "Spirit-Driven Discipleship," 331.

³³ Langford, "Spirit-Driven Discipleship," 334.

³⁴ Langford, "Spirit-Driven Discipleship," 334.

Spirit as actively present and intentional is a necessary key for helping youth understand the God that they are to serve.³⁵

The significance of this concept emphasized by Langford is that the Holy Spirit's intentional engagement. The revelation that Langford provides is that the Holy Spirit engages youth on a personal level to fulfill God's purposes for their lives. Additionally, the Holy Spirit, by doing so, is at work in the lives of young believers to bring about a holy transformation.³⁶ The work of the Spirit then is intentional, engaging, and purposeful³⁷. The intentionality of the Spirit reveals God's engagement with youth. Additionally, God's engagement, which is affirmation, activation, and aspiration, reveals the purposeful work of the Holy Spirit. This purposeful work is to produce disciples of Jesus Christ for the kingdom of God established in the truth.³⁸

In essence, from Langford's writings, the four elements that he mentions point to the significance of the Holy Spirit's work in youth discipleship. Langford highlights that the Holy Spirit is not a deity merely providing human beings mere morality, but so much more. The Holy Spirit is sovereign, missional, immanent, and relational.³⁹ The work of the Spirit reveals the power, purpose, and intentionality of God, concerning creation⁴⁰. The Holy Spirit establishes a foundation of truth through the knowledge that is taught by

³⁵ Langford, "Spirit-Driven Discipleship," 329-332.

³⁶ Langford, "Spirit-Driven Discipleship," 332.

³⁷ David T. Beck, *The Holy Spirit and the Renewal of All Things* (Cambridge, MA: Lutterworth Press, 2007), 181.

³⁸ Langford, "Spirit-Driven Discipleship," 332.

³⁹ Langford, "Spirit-Driven Discipleship," 329-336.

⁴⁰ Hugo Meynell, "Two Directions for Pneumatology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (1982): 183.

God to the young believer.⁴¹ The Holy Spirit imparts this knowledge through those who teach the principles of Christ to young believers, such as parents, ministers, teachers, or even through the Spirit's revelation in times of personal devotion. The power of the Holy Spirit involves entering the lives of young believers to conform them to the image of Christ Jesus. Pneumatology shows that the Holy Spirit provides a foundation of truth, power, purpose, and intentionality. The purpose of this is to stabilize the young believer as a disciple of Jesus Christ.⁴²

This analysis of pneumatology in youth discipleship highlights that the work of the Spirit involves a two-fold purpose. This two-fold purpose involves reaching out to humanity for the sake of Christ and drawing humanity towards Christ.⁴³ The Spirit does this through the church of Jesus Christ. In the lives of young believers, the Holy Spirit reaches towards youth, affirming who they are to be in Christ Jesus and through the affirmation of their gifts as well. Hence, the Spirit then helps the young believer utilize his or her life and giftings for the glory of Christ. By doing so, young believers then become more like Christ in their nature. It is by the Holy Spirit's continual work of reaching out and drawing others towards Jesus Christ that accomplishes the purposes of God. Nevertheless, this occurs through yielded vessels.

⁴¹ David Coffey, *Did You Receive the Holy Spirit When You Believed?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2004), 75.

⁴² Michael Eades, *And in Our Hearts Take Up Thy Rest* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 115.

⁴³ John McIntyre, *The Shape of Pneumatology* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2004), 173.

The Connection Between Pneumatology and Youth Discipleship

The correlation between pneumatology and Bethel Missionary Baptist is that the Holy Spirit's work mentioned above is what contributes to youth at Bethel gaining a knowledge of their identity and gifts granted by God. The Spirit's work is what establishes this knowledge in the young believer and empowers them to move forward as a disciple and witness for Jesus Christ. The work of the Spirit involves the three activities of the Holy Spirit mentioned above.

For instance, in the case of youth at Bethel, when the Holy Spirit draws youth to salvation, the Spirit begins to teach them about Christ. Understanding Christ usually occurs through avenues such as Sunday School and the worship service. Additionally, as children learn about Christ, this serves as a foundation for understanding who they are. They are to reflect on Christ. As the Spirit of God affirms their identity in Christ, the Holy Spirit then grants gifts to young believers that can be utilized in worship services and outside of the four walls of the church building. Moved by the Holy Spirit, young believers are encouraged to utilize those gifts to bring others to Christ.

This process is significant because it reveals the Holy Spirit bringing young believers at Bethel to salvation, establishing their identity, and affirming their gifts and talents. The Spirit's work is necessary because it reminds the young believer of whom God has declared them to be and what they are to do for the kingdom of God. Pneumatology, in the context of Bethel, serves as the foundational piece in the discipleship of youth. Without the Spirit of God, there is no active presence powerful enough to help youth establish a sense of their God-given identity and giftings. Hence,

the Spirit of God is the active force working to affirm youth to form young disciples established in their faith in Christ Jesus.

The work of the Spirit of God occurs to enable and assist young believers in achieving the purpose that God has assigned to their lives. Hence, the work of the Spirit in the lives of young believers is to give God glory. It is necessary to consider that the Spirit's work also involves the cooperation of the believer in Christ. The Holy Spirit enables young believers to submit to the will of God and fulfill the purposes of God for his or her life. The Holy Spirit's work is, therefore, fulfilled when the young believer is accessible to and for the work of the Spirit to take place in them.

Evidence for this is in Wonsuk Ma's writings through the believers who yielded themselves to the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Great Commission.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Joseph Cunningham's article concerning John Wesley's pneumatology also highlights the fruit of the Spirit as a result of the believer yielding to the work of the Spirit of the Lord.⁴⁵ As the Spirit of God affirms and activates, the Holy Spirit causes the young believer to aspire to fulfill God's will for his or her life. While establishing a foundation of truth in the young believer, the Holy Spirit helps him or her to yield to the will of Christ, allowing for his affirmation, activation, and aspiration to occur in their lives.

Conclusion

As mentioned in this chapter, there has been an examination of the concept of pneumatology, an analysis, and a correlation between its work and the context of Bethel

⁴⁴ Ma, "When the Poor are Fired Up," 28-34.

⁴⁵ Cunningham, *John Wesley's Moral Pneumatology*, 275-293.

Missionary Baptist Church. The concept of pneumatology emphasized was the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of young believers. The work of the Holy Spirit emphasized was one of affirmation, activation, and aspiration. The affirmation of the Holy Spirit involves the Spirit of God, establishing knowledge of the truth in young believers' lives. This knowledge involves teaching youth about Christ, as well as what he has said concerning their lives, identity and calling.

Additionally, there is an emphasis on this concept's evidence. The concept of pneumatology is in Charismatic and Pentecostal Theology, where there is an emphasis on receiving the Holy Spirit's gift to be a witness for Jesus Christ. Writers such as Wonsuk Ma, Joseph Cunningham, and Michael Langford mention how God's Spirit works in the young believer's life. God's Spirit works to prepare them to be a witness for Jesus Christ.⁴⁶ Therefore, what each of these writers' points to is the Spirit's work of establishing a foundation of truth in youth's lives, concerning who God is, what God says they are, and what God has called them to do.

The Spirit's work involves producing the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of youth. The fruit of the Spirit is a result of young believers living by faith in the Holy Spirit's teaching concerning their identity and giftings. As the Spirit affirms the identity, the Spirit also endows young believers with gifts activated by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the Spirit encourages the utilization of these gifts in the young believer's life.

Consequently, the analysis of these writings concludes that the work of the Spirit involves establishing knowledge of the truth in young believers to equip them for service in God's kingdom. The analysis of pneumatology highlights that the Spirit's work of

⁴⁶ Cunningham, "John Wesley's Moral Pneumatology, 275-293.

affirmation, activation, and aspiration is to move young believers towards embodying the presence of Jesus Christ and manifesting this presence to others. The Holy Spirit works continually in the lives of young believers to develop them to reflect the presence of Jesus Christ so that others may come to a saving knowledge of Christ.

The correlation between this theological concept and the ministry context known as Bethel is that it unveils the work, process, and purpose of the Holy Spirit in youth's lives. Pneumatology, in the context of Bethel, highlights the work of the Spirit to draw youth to a saving knowledge of Christ. When following the Spirit's lead there is an establishment of knowledge. This knowledge is one of identity and gifts granted by God to bring others to Christ as he is present in the lives of the youth. Pneumatology highlights that the Holy Spirit's work of affirmation, activation, and aspiration is what provides youth knowledge of their identity and gifts. The long-term goal of the Spirit is to produce young believers into disciples of Jesus Christ that embody his character and bear his fruit.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Having examined the biblical, historical, and theological framework for understanding how affirmation impacts adolescent's identity formation, consider an interdisciplinary example of the process of identity formation and how affirmation plays a role within this process. In this interdisciplinary chapter, there will be a focus on adolescent psychology. In the case of this subject, there will be an emphasis on identity formation. Additionally, this chapter will list a reason for choosing this topic. Furthermore, this chapter will list how identity formation functions and its impact on the overall doctoral project.

This chapter will address the following elements by explaining the relevancy of identity formation. By doing so, this chapter will discuss the following: a description of identity formation in adolescent psychology, a correlation between identity formation and the biblical foundations' chapter, theological foundations chapter, and historical foundations chapter. The importance of discussing these matters reveals the interconnection of identity formation with biblical, theological, and historical foundations for the doctoral project. Hence, identity formation is a secular element that is also an underlying principle within the project, contributing to understanding solutions to address the church context.

A Description of Identity Formation

Identity formation plays a crucial role in forming this doctoral project because of its presence throughout the project's biblical, theological, and historical foundations. How is this so? This formation within youth is the process that helps adolescents understand who God calls them to be. Therefore, identity formation is essential in this project because it establishes a sense of identity in youth's lives through a biblical, theological, and historical perspective.

This process helps youth solidify values, conduct, and an understanding of who they are.¹ The role of identity formation is that it involves adolescents discovering themselves, internalizing what they learn about themselves, and reaching conclusions about who they know themselves to be.² Throughout this process, youth begin to solidify and clarify what they believe, which allows them to deconstruct any false notions about who they are. The significance of this process is that it involves an element of discovering oneself.³ The discovery underway implies a deconstruction of false notions and establishing truth concerning the youth's identity. The importance of doing so is that adolescents can use identify elements that are not a part of their identity and the features that make up their identity within discovering oneself.

This process of self-discovery occurs in specific spaces. Within this interdisciplinary chapter, there will be a case study, which details an atmosphere, which

¹ Gary Gregg, *The Raw and the Bland* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006), 64.

² James E. Cote and Charles G. Levine, *Identity, Formation, Agency, and Culture* (Mahwah, NJ: Taylor and Francis Group, 2002), 6-7.

³ Theo A. Klimstra and William W. Hale, "Identity Formation in Adolescence," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 39, no. 2 (2002): 150-151.

leaves room for self-discovery, establishing conclusions, and forming an identity for youth.⁴ The following case study, entitled, “Informal Learning and Identity Formation in Online Social Networks,” involves using social media sites contributing to identity formation as space for this process to occur.⁵ The study, conducted by Christine Greenhow and Beth Robelia, involves students engaging in self-discovery, reaching conclusions about what they discovered, expressing identity, and using their identity formation to contribute to the community.⁶

The following study provides insight into the process of understanding youth’s formation of self, as well as their presentation of themselves.⁷ As seen in the study, this formation will reveal an understanding of oneself and understand one’s values, beliefs, communities, and involvement within those communities.⁸ Hence, the research involves a space, which affirms identity formation, appropriate expressions of identity, and a demonstration of roles based upon identity.⁹ The study’s importance is its correlation to the biblical, historical, and theological foundation chapter previously mentioned.

Greenhow and Robelia’s case study interact with David and Goliath’s biblical narrative by highlighting two key elements. The first element present in both the case

⁴ Christine Greenhow and Beth Robelia, “Informal Learning and Identity Formation in Online Social Networks,” *Learning Media and Technology* 34, no. 2 (June 2009): 119-140, DOI:10.1080/17439880902923580.

⁵ Greenhow and Robelia, “Informal Learning and Identity Formation,” 119-140.

⁶ Greenhow and Robelia, “Informal Learning and Identity Formation,” 119-140.

⁷ Myra Taylor, Stephen Houghton, and John Bednall, *Friendships, Peer Socialization and Social Identity* (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2010), 5-6.

⁸ Greenhow and Robelia, “Informal Learning and Identity Formation,” 119-140.

⁹ Greenhow and Robelia, “Informal Learning and Identity Formation,” 119-140.

study and biblical text is a space that encourages identity formation.¹⁰ For instance, in David and Goliath's narrative, the area that inspired David's identity was a field of sheep. In Samuel 17:34-36, David explains how he spent time as a shepherd, protecting his father's sheep. Furthermore, he explains that the formation in that atmosphere equipped him for the battle that David was engaging in with Goliath.¹¹ The field, where he tended to sheep, served as a space to form his identity.¹² In this field, the biblical text explains that he encountered a bear and lion who attempted to take one sheep. David was able to slay both the lion and bear, protecting his sheep (1 Sam. 17:34-37). His belief in God to help him overcome the giant contributed to his identity¹³. Therefore, this atmosphere contributed to David's formation as a warrior or well-equipped fighter to overcome Goliath by God's power.¹⁴

In addition to the narrative of David, the case study by Greenhow and Robelia involves students engaging in identity formation through the social media site known as MySpace.¹⁵ For instance, Greenhow and Robelia mention the following:

This paper presented findings from a qualitative study that examined how urban high school students from low-income families used the SNS, MySpace, to engage in self-discovery, self-presentation, and identity formation. Students used

¹⁰ Jane Kroger, *Identity in Adolescence: The Balance Between Self and Others* (London, UK: Routledge, 2004), 9-10.

¹¹ Ralph David Gehrke, *First and Second Samuel* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishers House, 1968), 147.

¹² Abraham Kuruvilla, "David V. Goliath (1 Samuel 17): What is the Author Doing with What He is Saying?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58, no. 3 (2015): 496-497, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLAIBCB160506001613&site=ehost-live>>David V. Goliath (1 Samuel 17): What is the Author Doing with What He is Saying?

¹³ Erik H. Cohen, *Jewish Youth Around the World* (Leiden, Netherlands: BRILL, 2014), 17-18.

¹⁴ Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *1 and 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1964), 152.

¹⁵ Greenhow and Robelia, "Informal Learning and Identity Formation," 119-140.

various socio-technical features such as photo-sharing, graphic design, and multiple communication channels within MySpace to convey who they were at a given moment and learn about others' changing lives in the network. While engaging in identity work, students were also gaining technological fluency and beginning to consider their roles and responsibilities as digital citizens.¹⁶

Greenhow and Robelia's study involve students who utilize MySpace. As they form their MySpace accounts, students engage in self-discovery.¹⁷ This portion of identity formation involves youth understanding certain elements that contribute to their personality and character.¹⁸ Therefore, as students understand who they are, they begin to engage in self-presentation.¹⁹ This identity formation process on MySpace involved students creating profiles, designs, and photos, which correctly display how they view self.²⁰ The discovery and presentation process served as a part of the formation of youth within this MySpace case study.²¹

The Connection: Biblical Foundation

The correlation between the biblical foundation and the MySpace case study is that the process of identity formation is present in both scenarios. For instance, self-discovery occurs in the biblical text as David recalls his experiences with the lion and

¹⁶ Greenhow and Robelia, "Informal Learning and Identity Formation," 135.

¹⁷ Howard Gardner and Katie Davis, *Personal Identity in the Age of the App* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 60-91.

¹⁸ Andrik I. Becht and Stefanie A. Nelemans, "The Quest for Identity in Adolescence," *Developmental Psychology* 52, no. 12 (2011).

¹⁹ Shruti C. Graf, Ronald L. Mullis, and Ann K. Mullis, "Identity Formation of the United States American and Asian Indian Adolescents," *Adolescence* 43, no. 169 (2008).

²⁰ Jan E. Stets and Richard T. Serpe, *Identities in Everyday Life* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 18.

²¹ Greenhow and Robelia, "Informal Learning and Identity Formation," 119-140.

bear. Within the atmosphere as a shepherd, he finds the qualities of a warrior. He finds himself operating in the identity of a warrior as opposed to a shepherd, which indicates a discovery of identity.²² Therefore, David engages in self-presentation when providing a rebuttal to the king's concern about his ability to overcome Goliath (1 Sam 17:34-37).²³ The place David walks in as a shepherd becomes a part of his identity as a warrior.²⁴ Similarly, the MySpace community serves as space for youth to identify the qualities that make up their identities.²⁵ The MySpace community involved a self-discovery process where students would find graphics and descriptions that were befitting for their profile.²⁶ Having a moment of self-discovery, students would reach conclusions about who they understood themselves to be.²⁷ Following these conclusions, students would then engage in self-presentation and develop a virtual identity for themselves.²⁸ Within this identity formation process, students would choose how to articulate and describe the elements of their persona that they identified in the self-discovery stage.²⁹ As a form of self-presentation, Greenhow and Robelia's study showed that participants revealed their

²² William S. Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2008), 140.

²³ Jayne Blanchard and Lea McNeely, *The Teen Years Explained* (Baltimore, MD: Center for Adolescent Health at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2010), 47.

²⁴ Robert D. Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 194.

²⁵ Charles Levine and James E. Cote, *Identity Formation, Youth, and Development* (East Sussex, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2015), 1-215.

²⁶ Greenhow and Robelia, "Informal Learning and Identity Formation in Online Social Networks," 119-140, DOI:10.1080/17439880902923580.

²⁷ Deborah L. Browning, *Adolescent Identities* (London, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 158.

²⁸ John Knead, *Working with Adolescents* (London, UK: Taylor and Francis Group, 1997), 8.

²⁹ David Moshman, *Adolescent Psychological Development* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1999), 93.

elements about themselves, such as ethnicity, their name, a picture, and location.³⁰ Four out of the eleven participants revealed their ethnicity; seven out of eleven revealed their first and last name.³¹ Half of the students listed their sexual orientation. Additionally, nine out of eleven had a profile picture or some other image used to identify themselves; seven out of eleven of the participants revealed their hometown.³² The significance of listing these factors is because factors such as name, sexual orientation, and pictures contribute to a community's understanding of others.³³ Furthermore, these factors provide youth an understanding of how they perceive themselves.³⁴

The connection between the MySpace community and the shepherding environment served as an atmosphere that encouraged identity formation. Within forming identity, David, and students from the MySpace case study both engage in self-discovery.³⁵ This step then leads to a presentation of what was initially discovered or

³⁰ Michael Wearing, *Social Identity* (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2011), 177-178.

³¹ Vonnie C. McLoyd and Laurence Steinburg, *Studying Minority Adolescents* (Mahwah, NJ: Psychology Press, 1998), <http://search.ebscohost.com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=19381&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

³² Greenhow and Robelia, "Informal Learning and Identity Formation," 130.

³³ Kate C. McLean and Moin Syed, *The Oxford Handbook of Identity Development* (Carey, ID: Oxford University Press, 2014), 97-98.

³⁴ Philip R. Newman and Barbara M. Newman, *Theories of Adolescent Development* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Elsevier Science, 2020), 171.

³⁵ Robert V. Kail, *Children and Their Development* (London, UK: Prentice Hall, 1998), 282.

understood about oneself.³⁶ Finally, the stage of self-presentation led to the formation of an identity projected to others.³⁷

The significance of identity formation is that forming identity provides youth the ability to develop specific skills. For instance, in the case of David, by protecting sheep from a lion and bear, he was able to create the gift of a warrior. In the process of forming the identity of a warrior, he was able to develop the skill of knowing how to defend the weak, as he would against the Philistine giant, Goliath (1 Sam. 17:34-37). Therefore, David was able to utilize a skill that he developed within and outside his context. In the case of students on MySpace, these students could develop ‘technological fluency.’³⁸ Within the process of forming an identity online, students were able to develop technological skills. These skills provide students competency to understand how to utilize technology in their community and outside of their context. Students who used MySpace were able to develop skills within the process of identity formation; these skills were useful in the context of the MySpace community, as well as outside of that community where ‘technological fluency’ is necessary.³⁹

Additionally, identity formation is important because it leads to an understanding of one’s function within the community.⁴⁰ What this refers to is understanding a person’s

³⁶ Sally L. Archer, *Interventions for Adolescent Identity Development* (London, UK: SAGE Publications, 1994), 64.

³⁷ Peter Weinreich and Wendy Saunderson, *Analysing Identity* (London, UK: Taylor and Francis Group, 2003), 7-8.

³⁸ Greenhow and Robelia, “Informal Learning and Identity Formation,” 133-134.

³⁹ Greenhow and Robelia, “Informal Learning and Identity Formation,” 133-134.

⁴⁰ Helen T. Arena et al., *Adolescent Identity Treatment* (Berlin, Germany: Springer International Publishing, 2014), 1-2.

contributions to the community based upon who they are.⁴¹ For instance, in the case of David, within his environment as a shepherd, he proved himself to possess the qualities of a warrior (1 Sam. 17:34-37). Therefore, David was able to contribute his qualities to the context of the war in 1 Samuel chapter seventeen. He was able to bring victory to the Israelite army.⁴² In the case of the MySpace study, students were able to form an identity online and find spaces in the MySpace community to contribute their qualities and abilities.⁴³ The environment is the space where identity is formed by the adolescent.⁴⁴ Therefore, the significance of identity formation is that it produces an understanding of one's role within the community.⁴⁵

Identity formation in both scenarios connects to one's assignment or contribution to their community.⁴⁶ The systems listed emphasize that learning one's role begins with understanding one's identity. Understanding one's identity begins with a process of exploration.⁴⁷ David and the students within the case study both demonstrate this trait.⁴⁸ David was able to identify his role in warfare based upon his formation in the fields as a

⁴¹ Aristi Born, *Capturing Identity* (Newbury Park, CA: University Press of America, 2007), 16.

⁴² Greenhow and Robelia, "Informal Learning and Identity Formation," 133-134.

⁴³ Langford, *Spirit-Driven Discipleship*, 331.

⁴⁴ Bradley A. Levinson, *We Are All Equal* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 145-189.

⁴⁵ Ma, "When the Poor are Fired Up," 28-34.

⁴⁶ Paris S. Strom and Robert D. Strom, *Adolescents in the Internet Age* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2014), 7-10.

⁴⁷ Richard P. Lipka, *Understanding Early Adolescent Self and Identity* (New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 29.

⁴⁸ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006), 8-9.

shepherd. Similarly, students identified groups and places on MySpace, where they could find an active role in their initial identity formation in the MySpace community.⁴⁹

The Connection: Theological Foundation

Concerning theological foundation, the matter of affirmation plays a role in identity formation. For instance, pneumatology served as the theological perspective, which would contribute to youth formation as disciples of Christ. In the theological foundations chapter, there was an emphasis on the Holy Spirit as the force, which supports youth formation. How so? By establishing an understanding of who youth are in the eyes of Christ and encouraging an embrace of that identity. The Holy Spirit affirms the essence of youth.⁵⁰ Additionally, affirming youth's identity also involves activating gifts and abilities within that were congruent with their identity.⁵¹ The activation of gifts refers to the Holy Spirit working in youth to utilize their skills from God.⁵² The gifts granted by God help them reflect their identity as followers of Christ as well as the presence of God in them. In addition to affirming one's God-given identity and God-given gifts, there is also the God-inspired call to utilize personal abilities and walk-in one's God-given identity. Therefore, the process of affirmation serves as an element that guides youth through identity formation.

⁴⁹ Wim Meeus, *Adolescent Development* (London, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2018), 1-172.

⁵⁰ Ma, "When the Poor are Fired Up," 30.

⁵¹ Ma, "When the Poor are Fired Up," 30.

⁵² Ma, "When the Poor are Fired Up," 30.

In the MySpace case study, the affirmation within the identity formation process occurred in the context of blogs.⁵³ For instance, Greenhow and Robelia mention how ‘students also used MySpace to present themselves and get feedback.’⁵⁴ Additionally, Greenhow and Robelia mention the following: “The blogger in the above example is not only reflecting on the tensions he feels between self and relationships but inviting feedback, which he gets in the form of ‘comments’ and ‘kudos’ posted by ‘friends’ in response to this entry.”⁵⁵ What this portion of the study reveals is that within the MySpace community, there was an element of affirmation that occurred as students presented themselves, as well as their perspectives, and would await the feedback of others.⁵⁶

In the statement above, encouragement of a youth’s presentation would serve as the support of the youth’s production on the blog.⁵⁷ This example demonstrates that within the MySpace community, there were agents of affirmation to support the creativity and formation of youth’s identity.⁵⁸ This affirmation occurred in the example of blogs posted by adolescents.⁵⁹ The support from friends within the MySpace community served as a sense of support for bloggers; the support given by the virtual community served as

⁵³ Greenhow and Robelia, “Informal Learning and Identity Formation,” 132.

⁵⁴ Greenhow and Robelia, “Informal Learning and Identity Formation,” 132.

⁵⁵ Greenhow and Robelia, “Informal Learning and Identity Formation,” 132.

⁵⁶ Greenhow and Robelia, “Informal Learning and Identity Formation,” 132.

⁵⁷ Richard J. Rose, *Paths to Successful Development* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 108-112.

⁵⁸ Maciej Karwowski and James C. Kaufman, *The Creative Self* (San Diego, CA: Elsevier Science and Technology), 49-50.

⁵⁹ Edmond Bowers et al., *Promoting Positive Youth Development* (Berlin, Germany: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 162.

an encouragement to youth utilizing their ability to articulate their opinions.⁶⁰ Therefore, young bloggers used their powers to present the identity that formed within MySpace. The heart of the matter is that affirmation was a force at work in this study that helped youth through developing their identity.⁶¹ By the declaration provided through blogs from the comments' section, adolescents established a sense of encouragement about the identity that they formed online.⁶²

The correlation between the theological concept of pneumatology and the MySpace case study is that an affirmation agent was present to guide youth through their identity formation.⁶³ In the narrative of David, the affirmation of David's identity guided him through his identity formation. The work of the Holy Spirit was to work in his life to produce the identity of a warrior. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit's work involved empowering David to function in his identity as a warrior. Hence, these elements were a part of the Holy Spirit's work of affirmation in David's life.

On the other hand, in the MySpace study, the affirmation of youth occurred in the context of blogs. As previously mentioned, youth presented opinions and were provided feedback by friends within their MySpace community. Friends' feedback served as affirmation of one's significance and opinions in the MySpace community.⁶⁴ Therefore, friends who were providing affirmative feedback served as agents of support. Hence,

⁶⁰ Jane Kroger, *Identity Development* (New York, NY: Sage Publications, 2007), 40-41.

⁶¹ Michael Sadowski, *Adolescents at School* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Pression, 2021), 1-296.

⁶² Greenhow and Robelia, "Informal Learning and Identity Formation," 132.

⁶³ Linda L. Pallock, *The Importance of Fitting In* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003), 79.

⁶⁴ Greenhow and Robelia, "Informal Learning and Identity Formation," 132.

these comments affirmed the significance of the blogger's identity, input, and contribution to the MySpace community.⁶⁵ A theological perspective relevant to the case study is that the Holy Spirit serves as an agent of affirmation, which supports the progression of identity formation in youth.

As seen theologically, whenever an adolescent is affirmed, it is necessary to notice affirmation agents. Theologically, the Holy Spirit serves as an agent that personally confirms the God-given identity of youth. Yet, the MySpace case study also highlights that affirmation agents can also be identified within the community.⁶⁶ The application is that God serves as an agent of affirmation for youth and does so through an adolescent's community. Therefore, both scenarios reveal that assurance of one's identity potentially occurs in the community and through isolated encounters as well.

The Connection: Historical Foundation

From a historical perspective, this doctoral project's historical foundation articulates that affirmation guides youth through their identity formation. In connection to affirmation agents, the historical foundation reveals not only people who affirm but affirmation itself. The relationship between this doctoral project's theological and historical foundation is that the theological perspective refers to an agent of affirmation. In contrast, the historical foundation chapter points to the concept of affirmation and its impacts. As previously mentioned, agents of affirmation serve as a force that guides youth through their identity formation. The affirmation itself provides a foundation for

⁶⁵ Born, *Capturing Identity*, 16.

⁶⁶ Greenhow and Robelia, "Informal Learning and Identity Formation," 132.

adolescents to build their identity. Essentially, the difference between affirmation agents and the concept of affirmation is that the agents guide youth to form an understanding of their identity. Meanwhile, affirmation itself is the foundation on which identity stands.

Historically, the impact of affirmation is that it produces an identity formation or identity development within youth. For instance, during the construction of Black YMCAs, African American leaders sought to develop a space that would provide a wholesome upbringing for African American youth. Within the process of developing these centers for youth, philanthropists would affirm the significance and development of these centers. Philanthropists would serve as the agents of affirmation, which encouraged African Americans to develop a structure to help their youth. The Black YMCAs would serve as a structure upon which youth could build their identity. The environment of the Black YMCAs would serve as a place where youth could receive principles to establish their identity. Hence, the concept of affirmation produces a formation within the lives of youth. Black YMCAs would serve as the structure or place of assurance where youth could form an identity of themselves.⁶⁷

The concept of affirmation and people who affirm play significant roles in the identity formation of youth. Those agents of affirmation are guiding youth towards the construction of their identity. How so? By supporting the youth's presentation of themselves, agents contributed towards the youth's understanding of who they are. Affirmation itself is the foundation that youth build their identity.

Affirmation as a foundation pertains to the doctoral project by revealing that the Holy Spirit affirms youth by speaking the words of Christ to them. In doing so, the Holy

⁶⁷ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 18.

Spirit directs youth towards developing an understanding of who they are in Christ. Yet, the Spirit of the Lord is not just the agent of affirmation but is also the affirmation of youth. The Spirit of God not only guides youth towards understanding their identity but is also the foundation upon which their identity stands. When youth are experiencing the process of identity formation, the Spirit of God through community and even personally serves as the agent, which encourages youth through the words of Christ to learn and be who they are in God's eyes. Additionally, the Spirit of God also serves as the structure of truth which youth build their identity upon.⁶⁸ The significance of doing so is that youth begin to understand identity based upon what God has taught them.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, the biblical, theological, and historical foundations for this doctoral project highlight significant identity formation elements in youth discipleship. The biblical foundation for this project highlighted that there is an atmosphere in which identity formation takes place. Within this atmosphere, youth engage in self-discovery, self-presentation, and identity formation. As a theological foundation, the Holy Spirit serves as an agent of affirmation. To be an affirmation agent means that the Holy Spirit speaks to youth in a way that causes them to progress towards forming an understanding of their identity in Christ. The historical foundation highlights that affirmation is the foundation upon which identity stands. Affirmation occurred in the development of Black

⁶⁸ William Garden Blaikie, *The First Book of Samuel* (New York, NY: G. H. Doran, 1912), 288.

YMCAs. As philanthropists supported the development of Black YMCAs, these institutions existed to positively help African American youth formulate themselves.⁶⁹

Along with the interdisciplinary work highlighted in this chapter, the points highlighted in the biblical, theological, and historical foundations reveal relevant information for this doctoral project in formation. The biblical foundation coincides with the case study in this interdisciplinary chapter by highlighting the following elements: an atmosphere that encourages identity formation and the insight into the process of this formation. Both the biblical foundation and the MySpace case study highlight that there is an atmosphere in which youth discover who they know themselves to be in the process of youth's identity formation. They present what they have found and formed an identity around that understanding.

The theological foundation coincides with this case study by highlighting an agent of affirmation present in this atmosphere of identity formation. Within this environment, the agent of affirmation speaks encouragement into youth's lives in a way that guides them to form an identity of themselves. These words of affirmation encourage youth to embrace their strengths and what they know of themselves. Hence, this encouragement urges youth to identify themselves based upon the assurance that they have received from agents of affirmation.

The historical foundation coincides with the case study by highlighting affirmation as the foundation upon which identity stands. In both scenarios, the affirmation granted to youth contributed to the formation of identity. By the assertion

⁶⁹ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 39-40.

given by agents of affirmation, their words or deeds contributed to youth's understanding of who they were.

About the doctoral project, each of these foundational chapters, and this interdisciplinary chapter reveals the relevance of affirmation in identity formation. The first principle that these findings highlight is that the Holy Spirit guides youth into environments that encourage an understanding of identity in Christ. For instance, the church serves as an example of the environment in which the Holy Spirit guides youth to engage in identity formation. Within this environment, youth are placed in a setting to hear teachings centered around the truth of God's word. Consequently, youth hear the truths of scripture articulated to equip them with an understanding of who Christ says they are and what he has called them to do.

Furthermore, within this environment, the Holy Spirit serves as an agent of affirmation in youth's lives. The Holy Spirit affirms youth to guide them towards forming an understanding of their identity. The Holy Spirit affirms youth at times through community, which is in the context of a church or another group that encourages Christian identity formation.

Additionally, the Holy Spirit serves as the agent of affirmation and as the affirmation of youth in the formation of their Christian identity. The words of the Holy Spirit spoken to youth serve not only as a guide towards forming Christian identity but also as its foundation. To be a foundation also means that within the affirmation of youth, the Holy Spirit serves as the one who speaks into the lives of youth and the one upon whom youth build their identity. When this occurs, youth develop an understanding of their Christian identity.

The importance of affirmation in the formation of Christian identity is that it serves as a guide and a foundation for youth. Affirmation in the identity formation of youth determines the direction that youth take towards forming an identity. So, more specifically, godly affirmations steer youth in the direction of developing a godly identity of themselves. Hence, the Holy Spirit's work, personally and within the adolescent community, plays a crucial role in the process of identity formation. This doctoral project hypothesizes that when the Holy Spirit affirms youth, they understand their Christian identity and gifts from God. Given the following hypothesis, these findings are relevant to the study of identity formation in adolescent psychology.

The findings and insights above draw attention to the hypothesis stated and the impacts of the Holy Spirit's work in the youth's identity formation. The Holy Spirit serves as the agent and foundation of youth's identity formation. Therefore, the work of the Holy Spirit in the youth's Christian identity formation is purposeful. The purpose is to establish youth in the understanding of their true, God-given identity. Furthermore, by understanding identity, youth are additionally equipped to identify personal gifts and abilities through the Holy Spirit's affirmation. Therefore, the Spirit's work of affirmation is to train youth to become effective and fruitful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to produce disciples of Christ, ultimately. By examining this case study, the underlying principle of identity parallels with the Holy Spirit's work seen in the identity formation of youth.

Affirmation in the case study and within this doctoral project plays a significant role in forming youth's identity. This element is what navigates adolescents towards identity formation as well as recognition of personal gifts and abilities. Therefore, in the

case of the doctoral project, godly affirmation guides youth towards a godly understanding of their identity. Furthermore, as youth develop a sense of their identity globally, they are positioned to discern, through the Spirit's work of affirmation in their life, what their gifts are. As a result of this recognition, adolescents determine what they are and contribute to the world around them. Doing so reveals that the Holy Spirit's work is coming to fruition in the young believer's life for the glory of God.

As mentioned above, the examination of identity formation in adolescence occurs. The significance of identity formation is that it reveals the process towards youth's understanding of who they are. Within identity formation, affirmation is how it functions. Affirmation serves as youth's guidance towards forming an identity. Additionally, affirmation also serves as a foundation upon which youth based their identity. Examples of this occur in the MySpace case study by Christine Greenhow and Beth Robelia. Within the examination of eleven students' identity formation on MySpace, students were able to receive affirmation through the contexts of blogs and other venues in the MySpace community.

The principles in this case study impact the project by highlighting the impacts of affirmation, self-discovery, and self-presentation in the identity formation process. Self-discovery and self-presentation are results of what students have come to recognize about themselves. Therefore, youth in the MySpace study began to present what they understood about themselves.

These findings intersect with the previous foundation chapters by highlighting the process of identity formation, the way to identity formation, and the source of identity formation. The process involves entering an environment where youth are free to engage

in self-discovery and self-presentation. The MySpace community was the environment that students entered; these youth then shared their self-discoveries through their profiles. The biblical foundations' chapter intersects with the interdisciplinary findings by highlighting that God orchestrates for youth to enter spaces where they engage in self-discovery and self-presentation. As a result of these two steps, youth are formulating an understanding of their own identity. Secondly, the theological foundations' chapter intersects with this interdisciplinary chapter's findings by highlighting how agents of affirmation navigate youth towards a conclusion about themselves.⁷⁰ The youth moved towards formulating an identity about themselves according to the affirmation that they receive. Thirdly, the historical foundations chapter intersects with the interdisciplinary findings by emphasizing that affirmation serves as the foundation upon which adolescent identity stands. The support granted by agents of affirmation serves as the foundation upon which youth based their identity.

The significance of these findings overall reveals that the Holy Spirit initiates identity formation. By the Holy Spirit guiding youth into identity formation environments, youth engage in self-discovery and self-presentation. The affirmation of the Spirit that occurs within discovery and presentation directs youth towards forming their identity. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit's assurance serves as guidance and as a foundation to base identity upon.⁷¹

⁷⁰ David Moshman, *Adolescent Rationality and Development* (London, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2011), 1-302.

⁷¹ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York, NY: Norton, 2000), 106.

The importance of the work of the Spirit in this doctoral project is that it steers youth towards an understanding of their identity in Christ. The Spirit's work of affirmation establishes knowledge of identity and abilities. Therefore, youth are equipped through this affirmation to gain knowledge of who they are and what they are capable of. As this occurs, youth then discern how to contribute to the world around them. The purpose of this work of affirmation is rooted in producing practical and fruitful disciples for Christ. The Holy Spirit's work equips youth with the knowledge to become disciples of Christ. This knowledge from the Spirit of God navigates youth towards utilizing their gifts and knowing their identity that they may live for the glory of God.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Having examined the needs in my own life and ministry context, I reached the conclusion that there was a common need was to address the matter of identity and, more specifically, the affirmation of one's identity in Christ. Therefore, in addressing the matter of affirming identity in Christ, the biblical pericope chosen was 1 Samuel 17:32-40. The passage highlights a young shepherd boy named David who prepares to battle the Philistine giant Goliath on behalf of the Israelites. David relies on the Lord for victory as he goes into battle. The adolescent articulates a confidence in God to affirm him in battle.

The narrative highlights how David trusts in the Lord to affirm him in the process of engaging Goliath in battle. David puts his trust in the Lord to deliver him from Goliath, and this is what serves as the affirmation upon which he stands. Due to his previous experiences as a shepherd where he protected sheep from animals, David believes in God to affirm him and provide him victory against Goliath as God did against the lion and bear. As a result of trusting in God for affirmation, David walks in the identity of a victorious warrior in this passage. The importance of the biblical foundation for this project is that it supports the notion of adolescents walking in their God-given identity because of discovering and trusting in the affirmations that God provided.

Noticing how affirmation provides a solid foundation upon which youth build their identity, it is crucial to also consider the formation of Black YMCAs that the

historical foundation chapter mentions.¹ In the process of forming these institutions, Black leaders such as Anthony Bowen and William Hunton sought to provide youth a space to develop into productive citizens.² The formation of Black YMCAs contributed to providing a space to mold Black youth into citizens that contribute positively to their society.³ As Hunton sought support to purchase property for this initiative, philanthropists such as Julius Rosenwald supported the initiative by contributing to the purchase of property for Black YMCAs.⁴

The support from philanthropists such as Julius Rosenwald served as an affirmation and foundation for the formation of Black YMCAs. His support serves as an affirmation for the identity of Black youth upon which to build their identity as productive citizens. Supporting the formation of Black YMCAs in this time meant to support the identity formation of productive Black citizens in the community. This relates to the project at hand by revealing how from a historical perspective affirmation serves as a cornerstone upon which identity stands.

One must consider the connectivity amongst the biblical and historical foundation to understand their relevance to the project. The biblical foundation reveals how when affirmations are applied, an identity is formed, and adolescents begin to walk in that formed identity. The historical foundation highlights that as an identity in which youth walk is formed, such identity stands upon the foundation of affirmation.

¹ Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 39.

² Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 18.

³ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 18, 74-75.

⁴ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 69, 73.

As God serves as the one who provides affirmation in the biblical narrative, this notion points to the work of the Holy Spirit in the formation of adolescent identity. From a theological perspective, pneumatology is a foundational concept that supports how God is one who affirms youth in the formation of their identity in Christ. For instance, pneumatologically, the Spirit of God affirms the identity of believers, activates gifts in the believers to walk their identity, and causes them to aspire towards fulfilling God's purposes.

One sees this in the example of Loren Cunningham.⁵ In Wonsuk Ma's writings, "When the Poor are Fired Up," Wonsuk Ma recalls the ministry of Cunningham, whose goal was to minister to youth to equip them to minister to others.⁶ In this example, Cunningham serves as an example of the Holy Spirit working through a person to walk in the person's identity and help youth do so as well. Cunningham's ministry not only points to the Holy Spirit affirming, activating, and aspiring him, but also points to the Spirit working through him to helping youth realize who they are as Christians, activate their gifts to minister, and aspire to fulfill God's purpose for their lives.

The concept of pneumatology relates to the project by showing that it is the Holy Spirit who provides the affirmation for an adolescent's identity in Christ. Therefore, whenever an adolescent is found walking in the adolescent's identity in Christ, it is due to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God affirms who adolescents are in the eyes of

⁵ Wonsuk Ma "When the Poor are Fired Up: The Role of Pneumatology in Pentecostal Charismatic Mission," *Transformation* 24, no. 1 (2007): 28-34, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/026537880702400105>.

⁶ Ma, "When the Poor are Fired Up," 30.

God, activates gifts and abilities within them, and aspires them to utilize what the Spirit taught them for them to walk in their Christian identity.

Being that the Holy Spirit provides the affirmation for the identity formation of adolescents, it is also necessary to consider how the Spirit works through others to give these affirmations. For instance, the interdisciplinary chapter highlights an example of how affirmations granted by others in a community support the formation of youth's identity. Therefore, in relation to this project, the interdisciplinary chapter emphasizes how others within a community serve as vessels who provide affirmation to adolescents. The result of this is that it serves as a foundation for adolescents upon which to build their identity. The interdisciplinary study points to how the Spirit of God provides affirmation of adolescents' identity in Christ through the affirmation of others within their communities.

The final project is a result of themes that each of these foundational chapters emphasize. Consisting of a Bible study on affirmation and a spiritual gifts inventory, this project demonstrates how the Holy Spirit works through biblical teaching to affirm the God-given identity of a youth in Christ. Throughout the project, the biblical affirmations taught in the Bible serve as a foundation upon which adolescents build their lives. Lastly, the spiritual gifts of adolescents are identified to empower them with a knowledge of who they are in Christ so that they may walk in the identity that God gave them.

This section discusses the methodology behind this project. The components of this methodology section include the following: a selection of participants, a structure of the project, the reason for the structure, and data gathering methods. Upon discussion with the senior pastor of the church, I secured a list of names of persons to contact for the

project. Additionally, I contacted students who are a part of the weekly youth Bible study were contacted as well. I notified parents of participants through text message and email for confirmation of participation in the study. I emailed parents a description of the study, a weekly schedule, and a consent form for the students to sign once parents gave approval.

The study first engaged participants with a virtual Bible study on affirmation. In view of the dangers of COVID-19, I desired that none of participants be at risk of experiencing sickness. Therefore, the entire study was completed virtually. I chose to do a Bible study to provide a biblical basis for the material and to help construct an accurate view of identity according to God's word. Within this space, there was an opportunity for students to raise questions or concerns so that God's word could address their concerns. Teaching became a passion of mine where I learned the significance of imparting wisdom from my experience as a student as well as a teacher. Therefore, I found this method to be quite effective when it comes to addressing the concept of identity in Christ.

As adolescents go through the process of identity formation, it is necessary to equip youth with biblical truths to understand who they are from the perspective of Jesus Christ. I intended teaching in the context of this project not to be a pure monologue, but a dialogue. Dialogue amongst teachers and students is something that I made space for in this study for the purposes of allowing students to construct an accurate perception of themselves and lives through the word of God. Through conversation with the teacher and each other, students can engage the material with questions or comments. Therefore, the material taught guides students to reach conclusions about their perceptions and the accuracy of such perceptions. I utilized a teaching method for the ultimate purpose of

guiding participants in constructing accurate perceptions of identity upon the solid foundation of God's word.

After the Bible study, there was also a spiritual gifts assessment. The significance of conducting a study on affirmation and a spiritual gifts assessment is to allow students to understand that a part of knowing who God called them to be is also acknowledging what God called them to do. Upon the completion of the Bible study, I gave the students a spiritual gifts assessment. The purpose of conducting this assessment was to equip participants with the knowledge of their gifts and abilities so that they may be prepared to walk in their God-given identity. Upon completing the spiritual gifts assessments, students would then have an idea of the gifts that God granted them so that they can operate in them. The importance of combining a study on affirmation of identity and a spiritual gifts assessment is that they both prepare students to put what they learned into practice. As students do so, they learn to walk in their identity in Christ. Consequently, students are equipped with knowledge of identity from a biblical perspective, as well as a knowledge of gifts to fulfill God's purpose for them.

Considering data gathering, I will address the various methods used to gather data. This chapter emphasizes three different methods of gathering data in particular. The purpose of the triangulation methods was to provide ways to decipher the results of this doctoral project. I gathered data using three different methods including pre- and post-survey questions, narrative questions, and interviews.

The project provided the pre- and post- survey questions to participants prior to the Bible study and after the class. Prior to the first lesson, I provided students with provided a link to the survey questions to articulate their understanding of identity in

Christ, as well as how to apply biblical principles when it comes to identity in Christ and the significance of doing so. These survey questions consisted of seven questions given to participants to gauge their current level of understanding prior to the study as well as their understanding following the completion of the study. The project utilized these survey questions to measure participants' understanding of identity in Christ, how they apply biblical principles, as well as how they view the significance of applying biblical principles to their lives. Survey questions were useful because they allowed for a comparison of what participants knew prior to the study and what they discovered following its completion. The comparison provided insights into the outcome of this project, which this chapter discusses further.

Additionally, the project used narrative questions within the study to gauge how participants processed the taught material. I utilized these five questions to measure participants' understanding of the material as well as how it affected their relationship with Christ and perception of their God-given identity. Upon the completion of the Bible study, I gave participants these questions to discuss what they learned about their identity in Christ and how they perceive its application to their lives. The significance of the narrative questions is that it provided an opportunity for me to see how they interpreted what the Bible study taught.

Interview questions were the final triangulation method used to gather data. At the end of the Bible study, I interviewed participants to articulate how the Bible study on affirmation impacted their perception of who they are according to God's word. Participants also received these five questions upon completion of the Bible study. The project utilized students' answers to measure participants' perceptions of not only their

identity, but the closeness of their relationship with Christ, and how the study impacted these things.

The methodology of this project involved choosing participants based upon pastoral recommendation along with contacting students from the church's youth Bible study. I contacted parents of participants and provided them with a summary of the project, a weekly schedule, and a consent form for participants. The structure of the project involved teaching biblical affirmations to enhance students' understandings of their identity in Christ. This teaching was coupled with a spiritual gifts assessment that would provide students of the knowledge of the gifts that they possess. The biblical study along with the assessment intended to provide students a holistic understanding of who they are in Christ, as well as what he gifted them to do for the kingdom of God. To measure the effectiveness of the study, the project utilized pre- and post-surveys along with narrative questions, and interviews with students to gauge students' understandings.

The significance of this study is that I structured it to help adolescents base their perceptions of themselves upon the eternal truths of the Scriptures. Though various beliefs exist, it is of the greatest value for students to maintain a Christ-centered perspective of themselves as well as their lives when encountering daily obstacles, new experiences, and new seasons of life. Therefore, the value of this project is that I structured it to teach students biblical principles that equip them to operate in the perspective of Christ so that they may live for God's kingdom.

The doctoral project consisted of middle and high school students ranging from age thirteen to seventeen. From this group of middle and high schoolers, seven participants engaged in this project, which consisted of a six-week Bible study. The Bible

study consisted of the class learning three biblical affirmations, which are utilized to empower youth to understand and walk in their identity in Christ. A week to conduct virtual interviews with participating students, to hear students' answers to narrative questions, to review the Bible study, and to complete a spiritual gifts assessment followed the six-week Bible study.

Within the Bible study surrounding affirmation and identity in Christ, the first lesson centered around Romans 12:2 and Matthew 7:24-27. The study used the verse found in Romans to introduce participants to the idea of allowing God to shape the way they see themselves. The session used Romans 12:2 to highlight the significance of allowing the word of God to shape one's thinking of oneself as well as the surrounding world. The text in Matthew chapter seven is where Jesus compares a practicing disciple of his words to someone who builds their house upon a solid foundation, as opposed to someone who fails to practice his words who Jesus compares to one building foolishly upon a questionable foundation. The study used Matthew's text to emphasize that adolescents can base their identity and worldview upon the dependable foundation of God's word. The lesson utilized the text in Matthew chapter seven to emphasize God's biblical affirmations as a solid foundation upon which identity stands.

The foundational chapters highlight that God affirms the identity of adolescents in the formation of identity. Within this lesson, the point of emphasis was that God's word is the affirmation that serves as a foundation upon which adolescents build their identity. The message of this first lesson emphasized basing one's self-perception upon God's word. As adolescents build their understanding of themselves upon God's word, they begin to walk in their identity in Christ.

Transitioning into the second lesson, the classes started with a review of the previous session. The second lesson of this project utilized Matthew 4:1-10, 1 Peter 3:8, and Matthew 7:24-27. Matthew chapter four speaks of the temptation of Jesus and his prevailing against it in the wilderness. This lesson taught this passage of scripture to emphasize how children of God can trust that God the Father will provide for them. In addition to Matthew chapter four, this lesson mentioned 1 Peter 3:8 to teach that God provided the necessities for living a godly life. With these passages in mind, the lesson taught the class the first of three affirmations—In Christ, I am accepted. I took these affirmations from an online Bible study called Thrive Bible Studies, which gears itself specifically towards youth and this study addressed the topic of identity in Christ.

Scriptures, such as John 1:12, found in Thrive Bible Studies supported the first affirmation that “We become a child of God.” A second scripture was John 15:15, which emphasized that “We become a friend of Christ.” A third was Romans 5:1, which highlighted that “We are made right with God and the sins that put us at odds with God have been addressed at the cross of Christ.” An additional scripture was 1 Corinthians 6:17, which highlighted that “We become a partner with Christ.”

The study supported and taught scriptural bases for first affirmations to highlight that as a believer in Christ a person is accepted into the family of God. Since one became a child of God, one can trust that God the Father will provide for God’s children. The summation of this lesson highlighted how Christian adolescents are accepted into God’s family by their faith in Christ and to be transformed to the image and likeness of Christ. As believers are accepted into God’s family, there is provision from the Father to meet the necessities of God’s children so that they may live for the kingdom of God.

The third lesson began with a review of the previous session and transitioned into discussing the second affirmation within this study. The biblical text for this lesson was Matthew 11:28-30. Within this passage, Christ invites those burdened by the law to find rest for their souls through receiving him as well as his teachings. With this passage in mind, the lesson taught the class the principle of rest found in Christ. The message of this session was to encourage resting or trusting in Christ. Through trusting in the affirmations of God's word, the believer rests in and upon a solid foundation. The consequence of resting in Christ is having a sense of safety and stability. Therefore, with these thoughts in mind, the class transitioned towards the second affirmation—In Christ, I am secure. Upon reading the scriptures related to this affirmation, the class ended with a summary of the lesson, as well as a time to address any questions about the lesson or its affirmations.

The fourth lesson began with a review of lesson three and was a continuation of the second affirmation. The biblical narrative for lesson four in this study was Genesis 7:1-7 and Genesis 7:13-16. The message of this teaching highlighted that as the believer trusts in Christ, God provides salvation from trials, through experienced turmoil, and within the tribulations of life. Observing the narrative of Noah and the flood, the lesson emphasized how by trusting in God, Noah received salvation from the judgment that swept others away. Additionally, he and his family received protection while amid the flood and salvation while going through a flood. Upon describing these types of protection granted by God, the class moved towards discussing the second affirmation once more. As the class continued to focus on this second affirmation, the message of this lesson was to emphasize how as followers of Christ, there is no exemption from

troublesome periods of life. However, for those who put their trust in Christ and his affirmations, there is safety from troubles, salvation while encountering challenges, and grace to take the believer through troublesome encounters.

The fifth lesson introduced the class to the third affirmation in this Bible study—In Christ, I am significant. The biblical text utilized for this first session on the third affirmation was Matthew 5:16. The biblical text in mind highlighted to the class that the believer in Christ is significant because of who the believer is in this world and that is a light. The believer has significance because as a believer God's presence dwells within the believer. The lesson emphasized the identity of the believer as a light. Therefore, this light is not meant to be hidden, but revealed to the world through living for Christ. When this is done it brings glory to God the Father.

Upon teaching this aspect of identity, the class looked at additional scriptural affirmations to highlight the affirmation of significance in Christ from Thrive Bible Study, such as John 15:5 that highlighted the principle that "I am a branch of Jesus Christ, the true vine, and a channel of His life." A second scripture was John 15:16, which highlighted the principle that "I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit." Third was 1 Corinthians 3:16, which highlighted the principle that "I am God's temple." A fourth verse was 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, which emphasized the principle that "I am a minister of reconciliation for God." The overall theme of this lesson was to highlight to students the significance they have because they are believers who carry God's presence within them to impact the lives of others for God's glory.

Upon reviewing the previous lesson, the sixth session began with a lesson centered around 1 Corinthians 12:12-22. The 1 Corinthians text highlighted the

significance of every role in the body of Christ. This lesson utilized these biblical passages to reemphasize to the class to the third and final affirmation within the Bible study—In Christ, I am significant. The purpose of this introductory session for the third affirmation was to highlight to students the significance of each believer's role in the body of Christ. The analogy of the body emphasizes not only that each believer has a role, but also that believers work together to fulfill the mission of Christ Jesus. Therefore, upon interpreting the passage of 1 Corinthians chapter twelve, the class discussed this third affirmation utilizing scriptures from the Thrive Bible Study lesson, which gave additional scriptures to affirm the significance of a believer's identity.

The sixth lesson was a continuation of the third affirmation. In this continuation of discussing the third affirmation, our class learned together about the value of each believer. The overall message of this lesson contained three points of emphasis. The first was that God values the believer because the believer is God's creation. Secondly, the class also learned from the third affirmation that the believer has significance in the eyes of God because the believer becomes a child of God by faith in Christ. Lastly, the believer has significance in God's eyes because the believer was given a significant role to fulfill for the kingdom of God.

Prior to the beginning of the seventh lesson, I conducted virtual individual interviews with students. Following these individual interviews, the seventh lesson began with a review of the Bible study and narrative questions. I utilized the narrative questions to gauge how students perceived how the Bible study impacted their self-perception, understanding of how Christ sees them, and how believing the biblical affirmations taught impacts a believer's life. Upon discussing these matters, the session introduced the

class to a description of what spiritual gifts are and why they are significant when discussing identity in Christ. I gave the spiritual gifts assessment to help students understand that a part of learning who they are in Christ also involves gaining a knowledge of what God gifted them to do. After the class emphasized this, students learned descriptions of spiritual gifts and then completed a spiritual gifts assessment. Following the spiritual gifts assessment, the class ended with the completion of post-survey questions.

To examine the data of this project, it is necessary to consider results from the pre- and post-survey questions, the narrative questions following the Bible study, and interview questions. Throughout the project, four persons who participated in the pre- and post-surveys also participated in the narrative questions as well as the individual interviews conducted. This chapter now turns to presenting the data indicating the results. Upon explaining the data, this chapter will also examine the data surrounding the remaining four participants.

Regarding the pre- and post-survey questions, the following results reveal data surrounding students' understanding of four components. To measure the validity of the hypothesis, the pre- and post-survey questions examined these four components. The first component examined participants' understanding of identity in Christ. An improved understanding of this identity in Christ helps students to grasp their callings as believers. A second component examined students' understanding of biblical principles that help them understand their identity in Christ. A third component of examining their understanding of how to apply biblical promises was necessary to consider when examining data because walking in these promises influences walking in their identity in

Christ. The fourth component of understanding necessary actions to take when applying biblical principles was also worth considering when examining the data. An understanding of helpful principles, how to apply them, and actions to take when applying them empowers students to begin walking in their identity in Christ. Lastly, measuring students' understanding of the significance of applying biblical principles was an important feature examined within the results of this project. Grasping the significance of these principles helps students to see the purpose of walking in their identity in Christ Jesus. Therefore, the following graph below explains the percentages of participants' improved understanding in each of these five areas listed (Figure 1).

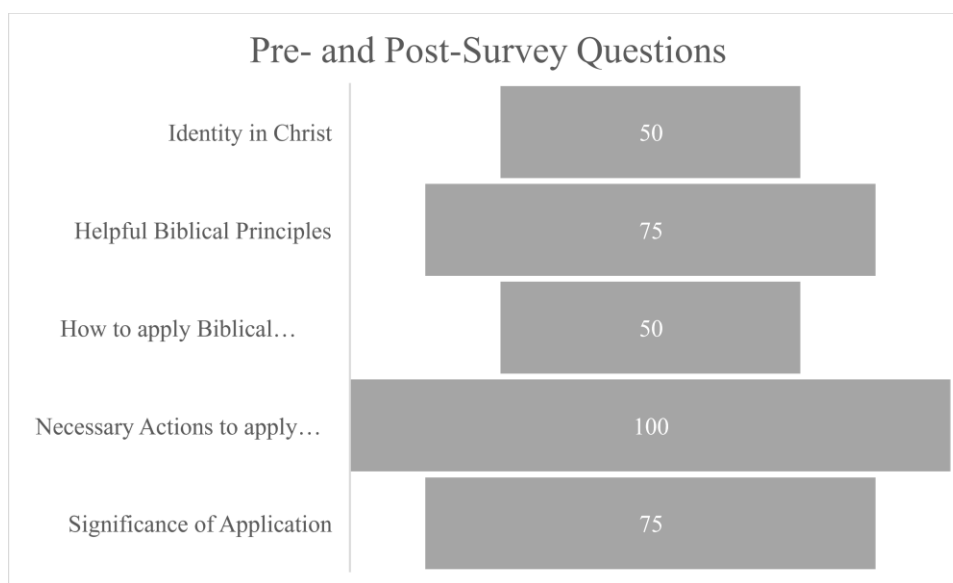


Figure 1. Pre- and post-survey questions

Upon examining the results of the pre-and post-survey questions, 50% of students provided responses indicating an improved understanding of identity in Christ. For instance, when comparing pre- and post-responses, the students within the 50% provided more specific answers highlighting a more in-depth understanding of identity in Christ. For instance, one student in the pre-survey defined identity in Christ as “You find yourself in Christ. He made us in his likeness and image, therefore we find ourselves

through him.” However, in the post-survey, this student defined identity in Christ as “What you see yourself as in Christ. How you perceive yourself/how God sees you and how that makes you who you are.”

The student’s responses indicate an increased understanding through providing a more specific answer that the student centered around the discussion and description of identity in the Bible study. Additionally, another student provided post-survey remarks indicating an improved understanding of identity when describing identity in Christ as an understanding of a person’s calling through Christ, which the final two sessions of the Bible study highlighted. Prior to the session, the student described identity as one’s knowledge of walking through God’s word with love and peace.

A second feature that these questions was measured was an understanding of biblical principles that help a person’s understanding of identity in Christ. Seventy-five percent of participants provided specific responses that highlighted concepts that the Bible study emphasized. For instance, one of the participants who indicated an improved understanding listed three affirmations that the lesson discussed as helpful biblical principles that she felt would help a person understand that person’s identity in Christ.

Concerning how to apply biblical promises, 50% of participants indicated an improved understanding of how to do so. The participants articulated steps discussed throughout the lesson. The lesson applied these emphasized steps to different case scenarios. The usage of these principles highlighted throughout the Bible study served as indicators of students having an improved understanding of how to apply biblical principles.

Regarding the fourth element, all four participants provided responses indicating an improved understanding of actions that are necessary to apply biblical principles. Each of the participants provided responses that centered around steps discussed in the Bible study, such as an in-depth study of God's word, doing personal research, communicating with a pastor or minister, reviewing scriptural principles, and practicing spiritual disciplines such as prayer along with scriptural study. The Bible study as well as the seventh session of the doctoral project emphasized the responses throughout.

A final element of understanding that the project measured was understanding the significance of applying biblical principles. Seventy-five percent of these four participants provided responses indicating an improved understanding of the significance of applying biblical principles to one's life. Each of the participants provided post-survey responses that were present in the messages of the Bible study, such as overcoming worry when a person understands the person's identity, realizing who God says you are, acknowledging who God called you to be, and impacting the lives of others through a personal understanding of identity in Christ. The responses of these participants indicate increased understanding of identity, as well as how to apply biblical principles to walk in the identity of a believer in Christ.

Upon examining the interview questions, data revealed how the Bible study improved participant's understanding of identity in Christ, awareness of identity in Christ, their identity formation, and improved intimacy with Christ. Amongst the four participants, 75% articulated in individual interviews that they experienced an increased understanding of their identity in Christ, as well as an increased awareness of identity in Christ. Furthermore, of these four participants 75% of participants concluded that the

Bible study helped their understanding of their identity formation, as well as their intimacy with Christ. Regarding identity formation, the remaining participant concluded that the study failed to change her perception of her identity, but it helped her understand the importance of her being a Christian.

Concerning the narrative questions following the Bible study, the data from these questions indicated that 25% of the four participants felt that the Bible study helped their self-perception and 50% of the four participants indicated an increased understanding of how God sees them. Furthermore, 25% of the four participants indicated an increased understanding of how failing to apply the affirmations taught can hinder a stronger relationship with the Lord. The reason for these percentages is that out of the four participants only this percentage responded to the narrative questions. For those who provided a response, the data of the narrative questions highlight an improved understanding of self-perception, how God sees believers, and the significance of applying biblical principles.

Regarding the remaining four participants, three participants participated in the interview questions. From the responses of the three participants, each of them concluded that they experienced an increased understanding of their identity in Christ following the Bible study in which they participated. Furthermore, each of the three participants articulated in their interview sessions that they also felt that they experienced an increased awareness of identity in Christ, an improved understanding of their identity formation, and improved intimacy with Christ. By these participants indicating that the study impacted their identity formation, their responses provide support that the study impacted how they view themselves and how they conduct themselves based upon God's

word. For instance, regarding identity formation, one participant articulated how the study helped her to find her place in God's family, which highlights that she discovered that she was accepted into God's family. Two other participants articulated that the study impacted their identity formation by helping them understand how they are to conduct themselves as believers and to put into practice what they were taught. From these statements, the data indicates that the teachings within the Bible study impacted students' formation. Therefore, students applied the principles to how they see themselves and aligned this perception with how God sees them.

A fourth participant served as an outlier being that this person did not complete the survey questions or the interview questions. However, there was an indicator of growth in these participants responses to the narrative questions. This participant articulated that he initially failed to understand how God was active in his life, but later shared that he gained an understanding of God's interaction and intervention in his life. This statement articulates an understanding of how God is at work in a believer's life to help them to fulfill God's will, which is the purpose of discovering identity in Christ. Therefore, this is an indicator of growth in the participant's response following the Bible study.

In summary, based upon what I gleaned from the data, students gained an understanding of identity in Christ. For the majority, it appears that what the Bible study discussed solidified the understanding already established in their lives. Retrospectively, the Bible study helped students to discover a biblical foundation for their beliefs, biblical principles to put to practice, as well as an opportunity to process the application of the biblical principles that the study taught. The lessons consisted of introducing a biblical

principle that served as an affirmation used to empower students to discover and operate in their identity in Christ. Upon learning these principles, the class would end with applying the biblical principle taught to case scenarios that students may face. Based upon the data collected this method seemed to help students gain a knowledge that would help them to understand who they are in God's eyes and begin to process how they can walk in this God-given identity.

From the data collected, students learned how God perceives them as Christians and who they are as followers of Christ. In view of this concept of identity, students learned biblical principles that they can use to affirm their identity as a Christian. The knowledge that students gained from these principles helped them to gain an understanding of who they are in Christ and to utilize these principles as a foundation for their identity.

The relevance of the data is that it presented students' understanding of what identity in Christ is, how it impacted their formation, as well as the steps to discover and operate in it. The pre- and post-survey questions addressed these matters by highlighting a student's description of identity in Christ, biblical principles that helped this formation, and steps to apply these principles. Operating in their identity in Christ is a result of the discovery of these concepts.

The narrative questions examine the students' understanding of identity in Christ, their understanding of how God perceives them, and the impacts of following the biblical principles taught to them. Therefore, I provided these questions to help measure the student's understanding of these elements (understanding of identity, how God perceives them, and the effects of following these principles). These questions highlighted similar

themes that the pre- and post-survey questions mentioned. Therefore, the importance of these questions is that they measured students' understanding of common themes.

The interview questions also consisted of common themes, such as an understanding of identity in Christ, awareness of identity in Christ, and identity formation, as well as its impacts on their relationship with Christ. The significance of the interview questions is that they also measured participants' understanding of the common themes surrounding identity, formation, and the impacts of these principles.

Based upon the results of the study, students learned biblical principles that contributed to an increased understanding of biblical principles to apply and how to apply them. By discussing biblical principles, such as the affirmations taught in these classes, students gained an understanding of biblical principles to apply to their lives. Students understood how the affirmations inform how they operate in their identity in Christ.

The data highlights that the knowledge gained from this study impacted the identity formation of the participants. For instance, a final affirmation taught in the Bible study was one highlighting the significance that a believer has in the eyes of Christ. What the class gleaned from this affirmation is the importance of a believer's identity and calling in the world. This serves as an example of how the class visualized the affirmation that one practices through fulfilling one's calling. The class's increased understanding and awareness of identity in Christ served as an indicator that the knowledge they gained impacted their identity formation. Therefore, this formation of their identity is evidence that participants applied the biblical principles taught to their perception of themselves so that they walk in the identity of Christ. Nevertheless, based upon these findings, the data supported the hypothesis.

The overall project went well because it allowed students to walk away with an increased knowledge that helped solidify students' understanding of Christ and who they are in His eyes. The class contemplated each of the affirmations taught and further consider how participants can apply them to the situations that they encounter. Furthermore, upon discussing the biblical affirmations, the class's completion of a spiritual gifts assessment served as the culmination of walking in the identity and giftings that God granted individually to God's children. Overall, the project allowed for students to gain a knowledge of biblical principles that helped them to understand their identity in Christ and how they can begin to walk in it.

If given the opportunity to do the project again, I would change the order of the final two sessions. For instance, I would complete the spiritual gifts assessment prior to the interview questions. The purpose of the spiritual gifts assessment was to emphasize that a part of knowing who you are is knowing what God called you to do. The project utilized the spiritual gifts assessment to help students discern the spiritual gifts that God granted them so that they may begin to discern how they can use their gifts to honor God. To place the spiritual gifts assessment before the interview questions would help because it would tie in with questions from the individual interview. For instance, I intended for one of the questions from the interview to gauge if the project helped students recognize that they have spiritual gifts from God. The six-week Bible study highlighted the idea of having a calling from God and an assignment to fulfill. However, to have followed it immediately with the assessment prior to the interview perhaps would have allowed the project to be more connected.

Furthermore, I would have changed how I measured the growth of students so that I could provide more graphical data to support my conclusions. I believe that the questions from each of the data methods were connected. The questions from each data method centered around certain themes such as identity, the formation of identity, self-perception, and the importance of the biblical affirmations that I taught. Therefore, in measuring the understanding of the participants, I gauged their understanding of the themes. However, I would structure my survey questions to be closed-ended questions to help clarify the data that I obtained. They were open-ended questions, which gave participants an opportunity to articulate their perspectives. Yet, I believe that close-ended questions perhaps could be more helpful when clarifying data. I learned from the experience about the importance of knowing how the structure of my questions helps me to reach conclusions about the data I discover. Lastly, I would have sent the narrative questions individually to each of the participants as I did for the pre- and post-survey questions. Nevertheless, I believe that with these learning experiences, the project supported my hypothesis by helping students to gain a greater knowledge of what they initially knew about Christ and how he relates to their lives.

What I would like to do following this project is author a book about identity in Christ. In the book I would like to write on the significance of utilizing biblical principles as affirmations when engaged in spiritual warfare. From the project, I concluded that it is possible to utilize the affirmations found in God's word as a weapon against the enemy when a person's identity or self-perception is under attack. The temptation of Jesus in Matthew chapter four is one of the biblical texts that I used as an example in the second session of the Bible study that caused me to consider this notion of biblical affirmations

becoming weaponry against spiritual attacks against identity. Therefore, I contemplate how I could prayerfully put this in book form. If I can write this, I would like to extend this to not only adolescents, but to adults as well.

In summary, based upon the data gathered, students indicated obtaining a more solidified understanding of the material. Through analysis of survey responses, narrative questions, and individual interviews, participants gained an understanding of who they are according to God's word so that they may begin to walk in their identity. Though the majority of what we discussed were things about which participants were already aware, they gained a biblical basis and understanding of what they learned about Christ from this project.

Data highlights that students gained an understanding of what identity in Christ is, how Christ perceives them, and the impacts of these affirmations upon their identity formation. Participants concluded that in the process of learning about their identity in Christ, the knowledge they gained impacted their formation. Based upon these results, the impact of formation is that it influences how they view themselves. Therefore, the impact of the Bible study on the identity formation of participants highlights that the affirmation was being applied to participant's lives by helping them to perceive themselves the way that Christ does. The importance of common themes, such as understanding identity in Christ, how Christ perceives you, and how it impacts your formation is that it points to the teachings that lead students to begin to see themselves as Christ does. This perspective that occurs in the formation of identity is what serves as evidence of biblical principles being applied so that listeners begin to walk in their identity.

With that being said, these findings support my hypothesis. The data indicates that students gained a knowledge of biblical principles, which were the affirmations taught, that they were able to apply to their lives. The students indicating that the Bible study impacted their formation highlights the evidence participants applying the principles to their lives. I utilized the biblical principles within the affirmations taught to help students see themselves as Christ does. Hence, to have this perception was the sign of growth and was evidence of a renewal of the mind produced from learning these principles. Following this study, students gained a better understanding of why they believe what they believe about Christ and his relevance to their identity and their lives.

The project enhanced students' understanding of how Christ sees them, and how they see themselves based upon what God's word says concerning them. Furthermore, the project not only increased understanding, but also helped students to solidify the understanding they had prior to the study. Students came with prior knowledge of what was taught but this study gave them a biblical basis with which they could support and upon which they could stand. There were elements of the study that I would reorganize, but the overall study went well.

What went well were lesson plans and their connectivity to the affirmations that I taught. The students read the affirmations based on scripture that I taught so that they understood that the affirmations were rooted in scripture. What also went well is participants grasped the affirmations taught. Students articulated that the study was easy to understand and helped them to build upon the knowledge that previously had. If able to do it again, I would change was the structure of questions as well as the order of the last sessions. The structure of questions would be closed-ended, and this type of structure

would provide more graphs to help reveal the findings of my data. I would not change my questions just the format. Furthermore, regarding the order of sessions six and seven, I would place the interviews after the spiritual gifts assessment.

Following this project, I considered the possibility of authoring a book consisting of biblical affirmations that can be utilized to help believers perhaps engaged in spiritual warfare surrounding identity. I would like to utilize this to help adolescents and would like to see this expanded to a broader audience who would wish to gain a biblical view of who they are in the eyes of God. I found this project to be helpful in providing clarity about how believers ought to perceive themselves. The study helps to base identity upon the foundational truths of God's word. Therefore, I find it to be a valuable study that provides clarity concerning how God's truths are utilized to alter self-perceptions and renew a person's mind so that God may be the One that forms identity.

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